WHERE TO GO IN 2025

BOONE, NORTH CAROLINA | GUYANA | PATAGONIA AZUL, ARGENTINA | WILD COAST, SOUTH AFRICA / COSTALEGRE, MEXICO | DANISH RIVIERA | OKLAHOMA CITY | BELGRADE, SERBIA | FREIBURG IM BREISGAU, GERMANY | KARAKORAM MOUNTAINS, PAKISTAN | LITITZ, PENNSYLVANIA / JORDAN | PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY, CANADA | ST. VINCENT | BOLD COAST, MAINE | BENIN | SUMBA, INDONESIA | CHIOS, GREECE / TOYAMA, JAPAN | AOTEA GREAT BARRIER ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND | OXFORDSHIRE, ENGLAND | PALAU | WESTERN AUSTRALIA | NORTH WALES | COLUMBUS, OHIO

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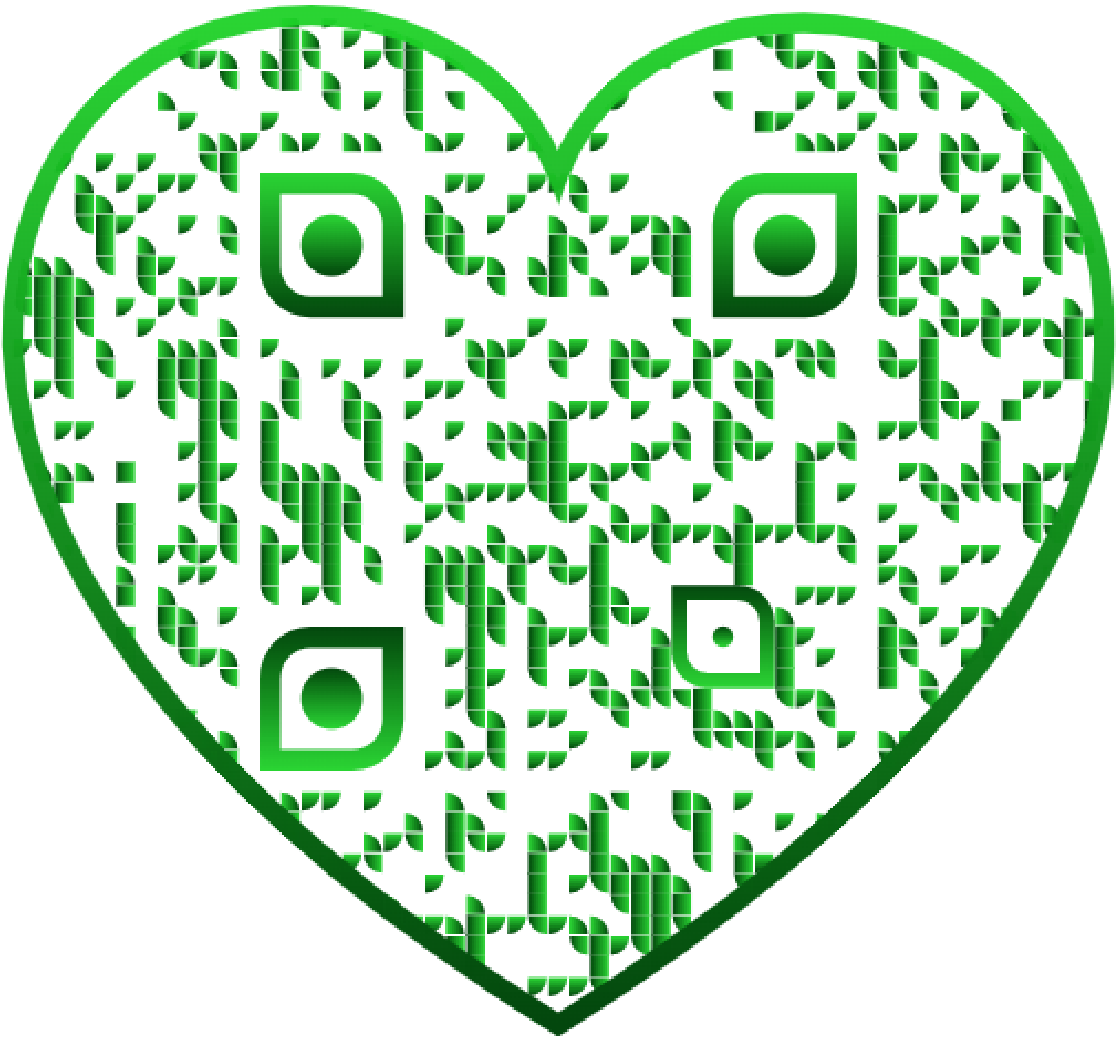
&

On the Blues Trail in Mississippi

A Trip to South Korea's Spectacular Seaside City

25 Surprising Places to Visit Next

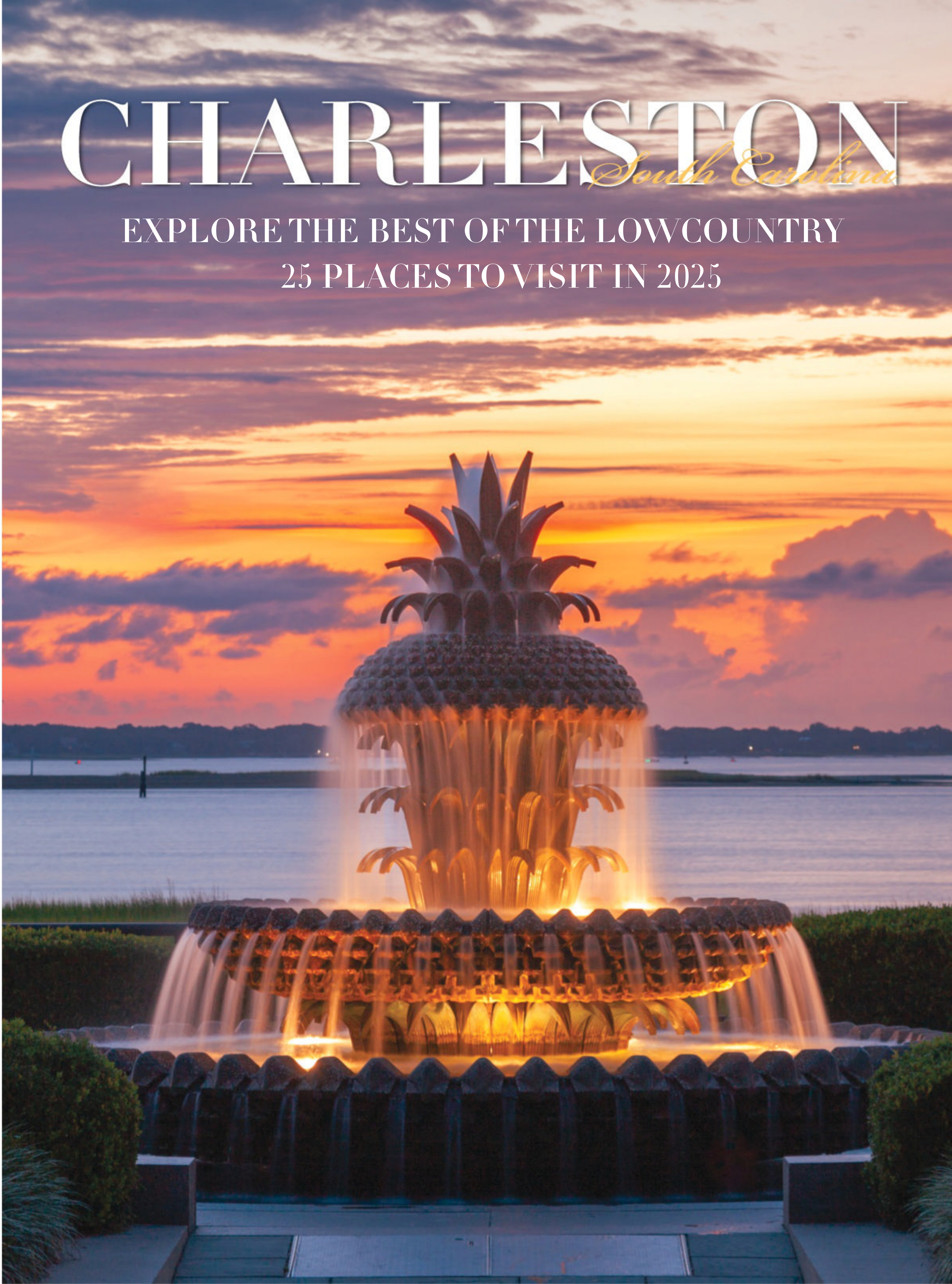


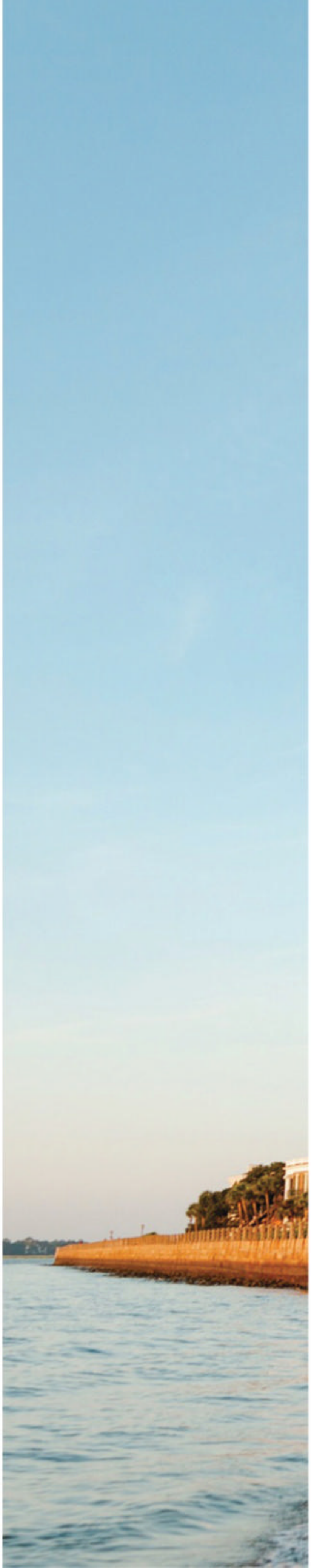
CHARLESTON

South Carolina

EXPLORE THE BEST OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

25 PLACES TO VISIT IN 2025





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PATCH WH

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VACATION GUIDE

EXPLORE THE BEST OF THE LOWCOUNTRY *25 Places to Visit in 2025*

Discover the perfect blend of culture, relaxation, adventure and charm with our curated list.

1.The Battery & White Point Garden
Stroll along the historic seawall with views of grand mansions and Fort Sumter across the harbor.

2. Shem Creek Boardwalk
A picturesque area in Mount Pleasant with seafood restaurants, marsh views, and frequent dolphin sightings.

3. Boone Hall Plantation
One of the oldest working plantations in the U.S., with stunning gardens and educational exhibits on Gullah culture.

4. Angel Oak Tree
Visit this majestic live oak, thought to be over 400 years old, on Johns Island for a serene nature experience.

5. Fort Sumter National Monument
Explore the historic site where the Civil War began and enjoy panoramic harbor views during the ferry ride.

6. Magnolia Plantation & Gardens
Famous for its romantic gardens, take a tour of the plantation house, swamp gardens, and wildlife refuge.

7. Market Street
Shop local artisans and discover sweetgrass baskets, a Lowcountry craft passed down through generations.

8. Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum
Explore naval history aboard the USS Yorktown and tour fascinating exhibits about the Cold War and naval aviation.

9. Drayton Hall
An 18th century estate, featuring beautifully preserved architecture and stunning grounds along the Ashley River.

10. Charleston Tea Garden
Tour the only tea plantation in North America, located on Wadmalaw Island, and learn about the tea-making process.

11. Cypress Gardens
Picturesque swamp landscapes, serene boat rides, and vibrant floral displays. Explore boardwalk trails and paddle through tranquil waterways, immersing yourself in Lowcountry beauty.

12. Isle of Palms
A family-friendly beach known for its wide, sandy shores and perfect for paddleboarding or volleyball.

13. Park Circle
A North Charleston neighborhood known for its eclectic mix of restaurants, shops, and local breweries. It's a great spot for community events, picnics, and enjoying the laid-back atmosphere.

14. Kiawah Island
Known for its pristine beaches, luxury resorts, and world-class golf courses, an ideal escape for relaxation and outdoor activities like biking and kayaking.

15. Seabrook Island
A quieter, more private retreat, offering uncrowded beaches, nature trails, and an exclusive feel, perfect for visitors looking for serenity.

16. Middleton Place
Explore this 18th-century plantation, featuring America's oldest landscaped gardens and serene, less crowded paths.

17. Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge
A scenic walk or bike ride over this architectural wonder, offers one of the best views of Charleston Harbor.

18. King Street Shopping District
From high-end boutiques to locally owned shops, this historic street offers everything from designer fashion to artisanal goods.

19. Freshfields Village
An open-air shopping and dining hub at the crossroads of Kiawah and Seabrook Islands, with art galleries, and live events, it blends Lowcountry charm with a coastal vibe.

20. Charleston Museum
The oldest museum in America, offering exhibits on Charleston's history, from its colonial beginnings to its role in the Civil War.

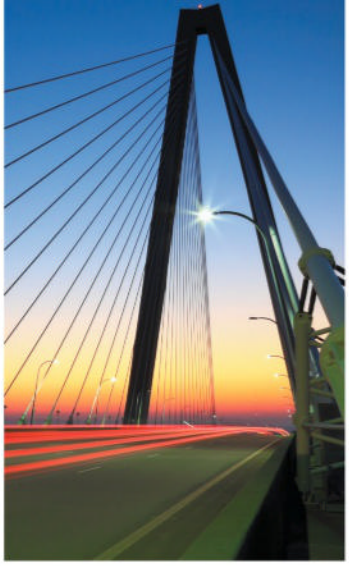
21. International African American Museum
A deeply moving museum situated on the former Gadsden's Wharf, exploring African American history, culture, and the vital role Charleston played in the transatlantic slave trade.

22. Charles Towne Landing
A peaceful state park with a rich history, where you can explore the site of the original 1670 English settlement, complete with gardens, nature trails, and wildlife exhibits.

23. Park Circle Playground
Located in North Charleston, it is the world's largest inclusive playground, offering accessible play structures, open spaces, and picnic areas making it a fun, welcoming destination for all families.

24. Riverfront Park
Located along the Cooper River in North Charleston, the park features beautiful oak trees, a large meadow, and historic naval monuments, making it a perfect spot for a relaxing stroll or a family picnic.

25. Charleston Visitor Center
The perfect starting point for any visit. Offering exhibits, tours, last minute accommodations and an in-depth look at Charleston's history, ensuring you have everything you need for an unforgettable stay.



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Cuisine is extraordinary, too. Think locally sourced produce in handcrafted dishes paired with regional wines, like Australian shiraz and French chenin blanc. For fine Italian dining, **Anthology's** seven-course tasting menu includes Sicilian prawns with burrata cream, tomato coulis, and lemon zest. At **Sakura**, look forward to pan-Asian fare—torched Wagyu beef tataki, fresh sushi and sashimi, and more.

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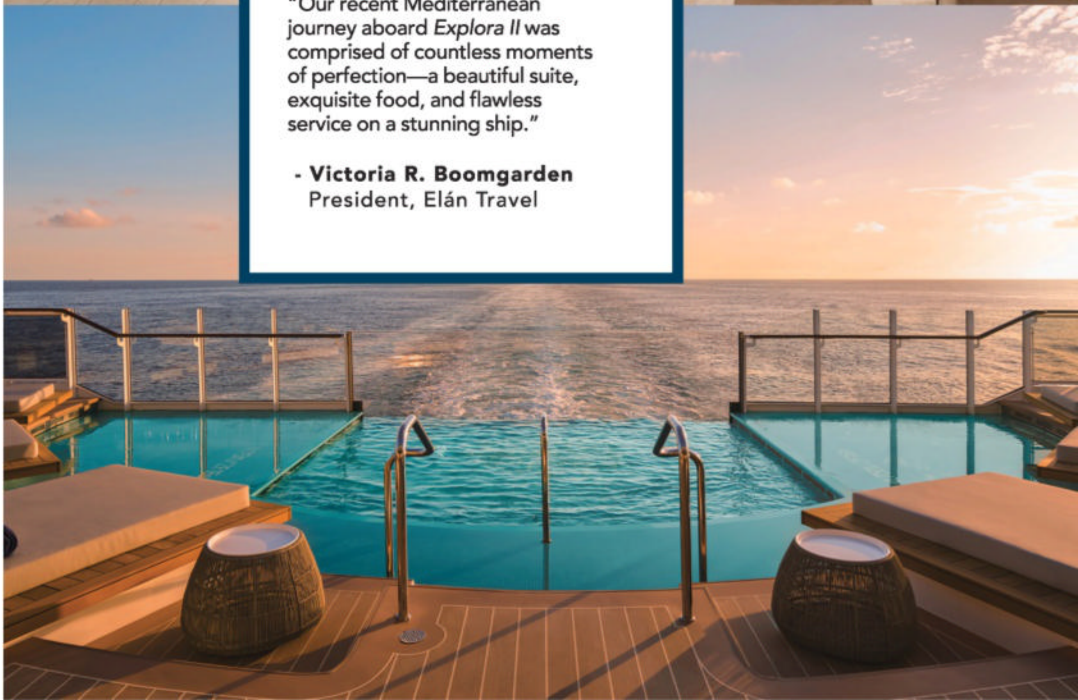
- **Victoria R. Boomgarden**
President, Elán Travel



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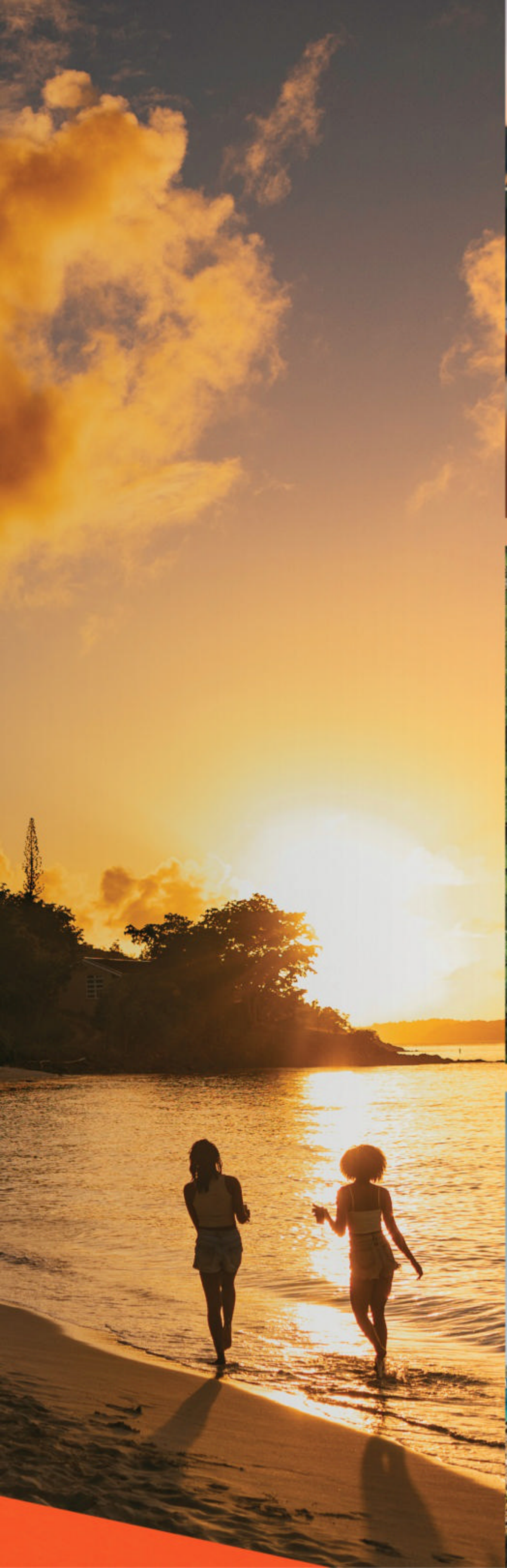

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Conical dwellings are traditional to the Indonesian island of Sumba, which receives a small fraction of Bali's visitors.

RYAN DEARTH

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Where to Go in 2025

Our prediction: 2025 will be the year of crowd-free travel. Here are our picks for the world's 25 most exciting, lesser-visited destinations to plan your next trip around.

Aotea Great Barrier Island
New Zealand

Belgrade
Serbia

Benin

Bold Coast
Maine

Boone
North Carolina

Chios
Greece

Columbus
Ohio

Costalegre
Mexico

Danish Riviera

Freiburg im Breisgau
Germany

Guyana

Jordan

Karakoram Mountains
Pakistan

Lititz
Pennsylvania

North Wales

Oklahoma City
Oklahoma

Oxfordshire
England

Palau

Patagonia Azul
Argentina

Prince Edward County
Canada

St. Vincent

Sumba
Indonesia

Toyama
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Western Australia

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South Africa

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TURKISH AIRLINES

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New tours and experiences are opening up Pakistan's Karakoram Mountains to international travelers, landing the region a spot on our Where to Go in 2025 list.

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UNPACKED
ANY BODY

Columnist Latria Graham reflects on the ways accessible travel can benefit us all.

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JUST BACK FROM
MIAMI

Afar Editorial Director Billie Cohen finds a different kind of cool in Miami's heat.

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SECOND TO NONE

In Busan, South Korea, one writer finds a city that's closely connected to the ocean, the land, the past, and the present.

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THE LIGHT FANTASTIC

In her latest book, Spanish photographer Pia Riverola spotlights small and meaningful moments from her travels around the globe.

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HOW BLUE CAN YOU GET?

A road trip along the Mississippi Blues Trail showcases the musical genre's far-reaching legacy.

ILLUSTRATION: HAYLEY WALL
PHOTOS, FROM TOP: PIA RIVEROLA; MIRANDA BARNES

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GO YOUR OWN WAY IN FIJI

From hiking through national parks and swimming with manta rays to visiting temples and staying in stylish resorts, how to travel among Fiji's more than 330 islands in the South Pacific.

See Natural Wonders

Scenic beauty and wildlife abound

Fiji Crested Iguanas
The ultimate off-grid experience, **Monuriki Island** is part of the Mamanuca Islands and one of few places on Earth where you can spot this iguana species. The creatures will be among your only company on this sparsely populated island that may look familiar as the filming location of *Cast Away*.

Garden of the Sleeping Giant
Walk through thousands of brightly hued orchids lining a boardwalk that winds past a lily pond and through a 49-acre rainforest near **Nadi**.

Ecotrax
Ride **"Velocipede" electric bicycle carriages** mounted on the old sugarcane railway track. Pedal or simply sit back and admire river crossings, mangroves, rainforests, the **Coral Coast**, and villages before arriving at a secluded, unspoiled beach for a swim.

Go on Active Adventures

Hike, bike, dive, and more

Manta Rays
These gentle giants have wingspans of up to 20 feet and frequent the natural channel of the **Yasawa Islands** seasonally. Delighting snorkelers and divers alike, the curious aquatic animals often get close enough for epic underwater pictures.

Salt Lake
Fed by the surrounding ocean, this **Savusavu** lake changes direction with the tides and is highly buoyant—ideal for tranquil kayaking. **Salt River Kayak Tours** float past towering mangroves while guides share stories about the birds and fish in the heart of one of Fiji's most pristine ecosystems.

The Great White Wall
This site on the **Rainbow Reef**, about an hour from Savusavu, is one of the world's most coveted for scuba diving. Its beauty is also partly why it's recommended only for experienced divers. A vertical swim through teeming fish leads to a wall that "glows" white with soft corals a few times a month.

Bouma National Heritage Park
This national park is one of the top reasons **Taveuni** is renowned as Fiji's Garden Island. A path meanders through a labyrinth of flowers and jungle roots before reaching the **Tavoro Waterfall** and its natural pools.

Shark Reef
Pacific Harbour is home to eight species of finned predators, including the world's largest concentration of bull sharks. Experienced guides lead explorations of the pristine waters, where you'll also see multitudes of turtles and fish, as well as rainbows of corals.

Experience Culture

Immerse yourself in the ways of the South Pacific

Sri Siva Subramaniya
The largest **Hindu temple** in the Pacific, Sri Siva Subramaniya in Nadi features master craftsmanship and intricately carved deities in vibrant colors, lauded by architecture scholars. Look up to see frescoes as riotously bright as the exterior.

Sigatoka River
Delve into culture and heart-pounding thrills on a **river safari** embarking about an hour from the Coral Coast. Aboard a custom-built jet boat, you'll traverse the longest river of Fiji's main island en route to a traditional village. Feast on lunch and participate in a **kava** ceremony with the chief, sampling Fiji's most iconic beverage.

Where to Eat and Stay

Enjoy beachside restaurants and hotels

Cloud 9 Floating Bar
Chill out with cold drinks and gourmet pizzas at this two-story restaurant in the **Mamanuca Islands**. Then, kick back and swim in clear, turquoise waters to music from a live DJ.

Yasawa Island Resort
Luxury and serenity await at this property in the Yasawa Islands, one of many hotels hugging the white-sand coastline. From here, it's easy to check out the nearby underwater **Sawa-i-Lau Caves**, where sunlight dapples the limestone cavities and illuminates the waters.

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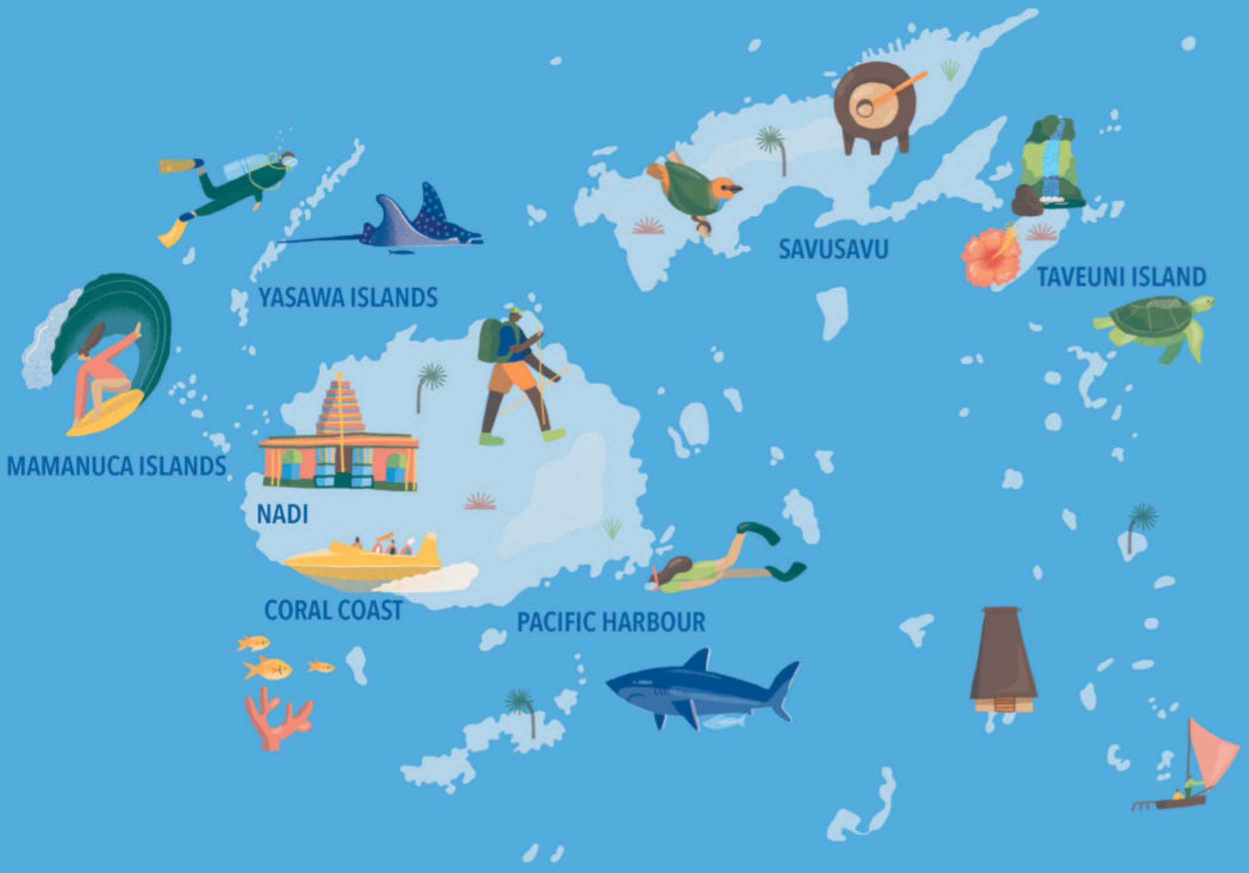
Go Beyond the Beaches in This

TROPICAL ARCHIPELAGO

No matter where you find yourself in Fiji or what kind of traveler you are, there's something to inspire you. Get up close and personal with bull sharks, manta rays, and colorful coral and fish, and immerse yourself in the archipelago's rich culture on a village visit. Marvel at verdant rainforests, rushing waterfalls, underwater caves, and the lush blossoms of orchids and other tropical flowers. Kayak past mangroves while bird-watching, swim in natural pools, and go on a river safari. Relax on white-sand beaches and at dreamy beachfront hotels that capture the spirit of the South Pacific.


SAVUSAVU
TAVEUNI ISLAND
YASAWA ISLANDS
MAMANUCA ISLANDS
NADI
CORAL COAST
PACIFIC HARBOUR

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Busan is a city unlike any other in Korea, a place where visitors can feel like time travelers, immersed at once in a complicated past and a vibrant present.

SECOND TO NONE

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JUN MICHAEL PARK

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Fewer Crowds, More Wonder

One of our picks for Where to Go in 2025 (page 27) is Denmark's North Zealand coast, where travelers can cycle along beaches lined with candy-striped huts.

ANN JØRGENSEN/VISITNORDSJÆLLAND

IN BARCELONA, tourist-weary residents have sprayed visitors with water guns. In Bali, the government has banned new hotel construction. And in Mallorca, local neighborhood associations and community groups have marched and demanded to limit mass tourism. The message is getting clearer in popular travel destinations around the world: Overtourism—when too many people visit a place, compromising it for the residents as well as for themselves—is a growing problem.

Every fall, we publish our recommendations for Where to Go in the coming year. This time around, we've dedicated our list to lesser-visited places. Our writers have reported from all over the world to present 25 destinations where you won't find huge crowds and where your visit could really count.

For example, I wrote about a program in coastal Patagonia (page 67) that brings together tourism and rewilding with low-impact glamping sites and an interpretation center that introduces guests to conservation efforts in the biodiverse region. In Western Australia (page 50), meanwhile, a new initiative is expanding access to Aboriginal-led activities across the state.

Elsewhere on our Where to Go list, we spotlight the Danish Riviera (page 43), a favorite among locals for its windswept beaches and historic hotels just 90 minutes from Copenhagen. Closer to home, Oklahoma City's film and food scenes are booming (page 66).

As I helped edit these stories, I was reminded that the world offers a never-ending spool of surprises, and, however well traveled we might be, there's always something new to experience. Where will you go next?

Travel well,
TIM CHESTER
Deputy Editor

TRY SOMETHING NEW SOMEWHERE NEW.

Craving a European getaway without hopping the pond? Try Québec, Canada. Cobblestone streets and rich French history give it Euro-flair, but it's lively winter charm makes it like none other. Come warm your heart at Carnaval de Québec or brave the cold at Québec's one-of-a-kind ice hotel. Hop on an 800-foot toboggan slide overlooking the majestic St. Lawrence River or throw caution to the wind and "french fries" and "pizza" your way down the slopes. If you'd rather your french fries be the edible kind, try Québec's culinary trifecta, poutine. Or sink your teeth into the province's vast gastronomic landscape where the warmth of its people is most evident around a table. Drawing from the flavours of its French and Indigenous roots, you'll be wowed by every meal celebrating tradition and innovation. Whatever vibrant cuisine or activity you choose, you'll discover how winter in Québec isn't just a season, it's a celebration.

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by **LATRIA GRAHAM**

Illustrations by **HAYLEY WALL**

Any Body

On a trip with her mother, our columnist finds that making travel more accessible is not only possible, but beneficial for everyone involved.

MY FIRST TRIP TO PARIS with my mother was in 2014. Every morning, we started walking along the Seine River, and by the end of each day had covered a dozen miles. One afternoon, we wandered through the Marais district, popped into gardens, and posed in front of fountains between the 11th arrondissement and our attic apartment near the Louvre Museum. On the cusp of evening, we ascended the dark, narrow spiral staircase up to the bell tower of Notre-Dame cathedral. We spent much of our monthlong stay this way, willing and able to climb toward what we wanted to see, never considering the limits of our bodies.

Three years later, we flew to Paris again, and I realized my mother's mobility had deteriorated. For decades, she had worked a physically demanding job as a mail carrier, and it had taken its toll. During that trip in 2017 she required assistance getting through the security line and couldn't get comfortable on the flight. I noticed the shuffle step she adopted. She needed a cane, or perhaps a wheelchair. Unprepared, we had neither.

Visiting some of her favorite fabric stores meant winding through the cobbled streets of Montmartre, which sits atop a large hill. When the metro was under construction, we had to take a maze-like detour. I watched my mother tackle flights of stairs and creep through tunnels, stopping every 10 steps or so. I acknowledged that our definition of travel would have to change—and quickly.

The change forced us to articulate what our Paris priorities and desires were. While she was processing her feelings about the shifts in her body's abilities, I made myself the logistics person, reorganizing the remainder of our trip and researching ways to still experience the city.

I'd always coordinated and arranged our family's trips, but now I had to remind myself: *Have I considered my mother's point of view?* Even though she knows I have her best interests at heart, she likes her independence and hates when people assume what she wants.

As we made our way around Paris, I asked my mom if she wanted to take more breaks. She did, so we sought out benches. I checked websites and called establishments to confirm elevator access, toilet grab bars, and shower seats.

This real-time adjustment was my first experience with accessible travel. I realized that, if armed with the right information, I could alleviate some frustrating—and possibly humiliating—situations for someone I loved.

In the years since, my mother and I have continued traveling together. We've visited waterfalls and stood on top of mountains. We've found our way around San Francisco on its public transit system. The cobblestone streets of Charleston, South Carolina, are less of a challenge than they once were, because I know to rent a wheelchair beforehand and explore alternate routes. I scour visitors' bureaus and blogs such as BLD Experiences (with stories by Black disabled travelers) and Instagram accounts including @curbfreecorylee.

But our travels take more than research—they require constant communication. On the road, I ask my mother a series of questions: *How's your pain? Is there anything we should cut or rearrange? If things go awry, what would you like to prioritize?* When possible, we allow her answers to shape our days.

I realized that, if armed with the right information, I could alleviate some frustrating—and possibly humiliating—situations for someone I loved.

We talk. We adjust. We attempt to do our best.

When we fly together, I double the amount of time I think we might need to get through the airport. Ahead of our trips, I refresh my knowledge of the accessibility policies for planes, trains, and buses as well as federal laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA), which prohibits airlines doing business in the United States from discriminating against passengers with disabilities. I book everything as far in advance as I can, knowing that there might be a limited number of ADA-compliant hotel rooms or all-terrain wheelchairs.

Now in my late thirties, I'm also being forced to reassess my relationship with my own body. There are moments when my feet are less steady than they used to be, when I find myself searching for a handrail, when I feel daunted by steps that seem to stretch unending into the distance. I'm more sensitive to noise, and I often double-check restaurant reviews before I reserve to see if other visitors have had issues with din that can overwhelm crowded spaces.

On the road, I speak up when I see solutions. Sometimes it's as simple as asking for a different type of seating at a café or inquiring about the availability of all-terrain wheelchairs on beaches. I do what I can to be an advocate—not just for my mother, but for every other traveler with a seen or unseen disability. Because I know that one day, I might be in the same boat.

CITTADELLA, GOZO
Explore more treasures
VisitMalta

The well restored Cittadella, one of Malta's ancient fortified cities, stands out as Gozo's major landmark, visible from all over the island and offering stunning views of the Mediterranean. Its winding streets reveal archaeological treasures and cultural secrets, bringing history to life.

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Cappadocia, Nevşehir

There's No Place Like
Cappadocia

If you wish to travel in time and explore a world beyond your imagination, Cappadocia is the place for you. A unique and unrivaled terrain, unforgettable sunsets, wonderous ancient cave dwellings and unmatched underground cities, this enchanted land invites you on the journey of a lifetime.

FOR CURIOUS MINDS

Dramatic Natural Landforms

The enthralling history of Cappadocia dates back millions of years to the eruption of the two extinct volcanoes of Central Anatolia, the **Erciyes** and **Hasan**. The tuff and basalt layering throughout the region was then eroded by the wind —the interplay of hot and cold air currents forming the amorphous rocks into conical "fairy chimneys" and rock pillars for miles on end.

A Storied Past

As the natural formations were completed, humans began to slowly make their way, adding migrations, invasions and conquering to this storied history. **Luwians** and **Hittites** were the first inhabitants of the region. They carved troglodyte settlements into these very rocks and engineered complete subterranean cities with ventilated living areas. Much later, Christians who fled oppression found their new home here, repurposing some of the dwellings as churches and monasteries. Today, these ancient structures seek to whisk you away in both time and wonder.

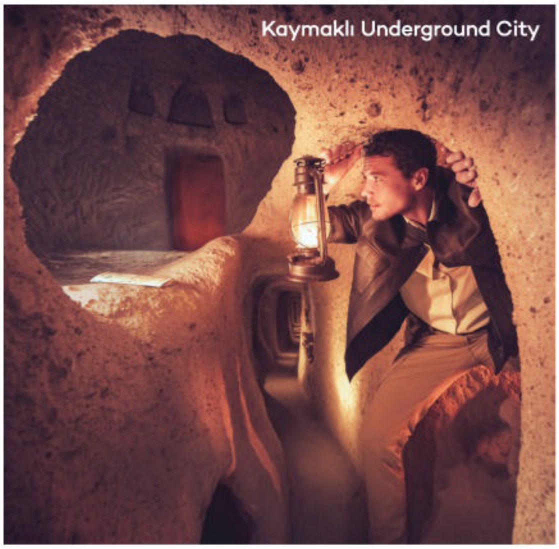
FOR EXPLORERS

UNESCO-Recognized Rock Churches

Designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985, the Göreme Valley and the rock sites of Cappadocia cast their enigmatic charm far and wide. The captivating interiors of the 10th and 11th-century churches carved into the soft rocks in **Göreme Open Air Museum** depict biblical scenes through detailed mural paintings, comprising some of the best examples of post-iconoclastic Eastern Roman (Byzantine) art.

A Lunar Landscape Here on Earth

Cappadocia is a maze of volcanic valleys where nature lovers can find an almost infinite variety of hiking trails on lunar-like terrain. Each of these valleys has its own distinct character and showcases inspiring marvels like ancient dwellings, hermit cells and cave chapels. The 6-km-long **Pigeon Valley** connects the towns of Uçhisar and Göreme, offering a popular trekking route along which you can see several fairy chimneys cut as pigeon nests. The droppings of these birds have been used for ages by locals as fertilizers, no doubt an aid to the prolific harvests of the region's notable vineyards. The 14-km-long **Ihlara Valley**, on the other hand, offers a moderate walk


Kaymaklı Underground City

through a deep canyon. Taking up to four hours, this hike unveils more than 10 rock-carved churches, all waiting to be explored. Other trails not to be missed include **Love Valley** with its impossibly soaring rock pillars and **Güllüdere Valley**, famous for beguiling, moonlit night walks.

A Cavernous Subterranean World

Throughout the millennia, residents of Cappadocia have created multilevel underground cities, some of which are open for tourist exploration today. **Derinkuyu** and **Kaymaklı** are the largest, but copious examples of these subterranean cities that exist throughout the region. These underground municipalities were interconnected to each other and to the houses above —through a complex system of tunnels. Burroughing up to 85 meters below the land's surface, these cities were designed in the form of sprawling labyrinths and featured kilometers of narrow passages and chambers to ensure that the thousands of inhabitants could take shelter and even thrive during long periods of conflict.

FOR CULTURE ENTHUSIASTS

Exploring Local Handwoven Rugs

While in Cappadocia, you will have easy access to a large array of carpets and nomadic kilims from all of Türkiye. Visit one of the inviting stores in **Göreme**, **Avanos** and **Ürgüp** to get lost in colors and designs — maybe even post them to your Instagram.

Learning to Make Pottery

As the Kızılırmak River has flowed tirelessly through Avanos for eons, the soft and oily clay sourced from the riverbeds has been a pivotal resource here, making **Avanos** the home of a rich pottery tradition dating back to the Hittites. Each unique flaw in the clay brings out the authentic beauty of these handmade treasures, which are subsequently colored in earthy tones and, of course, turquoise.

Discovering the Silk Road

The Silk Road trade routes featured a complex network of *caravanserais*, or fortress-like guest houses for traveling merchants and their caravans. Cappadocia was one of the important stopovers along that historic passage and still boasts several remaining 13th-century inns, all within a day's journey of each other. **Ağzıkara Han** in Aksaray and **Saruhan** in Avanos are two prime examples, restored to their old glory and hosting private events and Sema ceremonies with the country's renowned whirling dervishes.

Cave hotel in Göreme

FOR ROMANTICS

Sleeping in a Luxurious Cave Hotel

Uçhisar, **Ürgüp** and **Göreme** are towns replete with mythic cave dwellings and stone mansions carved from the rocks themselves. Many of these ancient abodes have been transformed into luxurious boutique hotels, offering modern amenities like cave suites, Turkish baths and spas. Guests can enjoy panoramic terraces with infinity pools, perfect for watching the daily spectacle of hot air balloons soaring at sunrise.

Divine Sunsets Over Volcanic Valleys

Sunset at **Rose Valley**, or near the rock castles of **Uçhisar** and **Ortahisar**, offers unforgettable romantic moments with the sky ablaze in rich crimson. In Rose Valley, the pink hue given off by the sandstone's unique minerals makes the experience even more glorious. Additionally, the multi-story citadels of Uçhisar and Ortahisar stretch into the sky, forming the perfect backdrop for the Cappadocian sunset.

FOR ADVENTURERS

Cappadocia From a Bird's Eye View

Over the past two decades, the land of fairy chimneys has increasingly drawn travelers for hot-air balloon adventures. As the sun rises over the marvelous Cappadocian terrain, several balloons start their one-hour journey during which the visitors will have a chance to see the region from a whole new perspective, gliding over awe-inspiring land formations, orchards and vineyards.

Horseback Riding of a Lifetime

A great way to discover Cappadocia is on horseback. The name Cappadocia is thought to derive from '*Katpatuka*', meaning 'land of beautiful horses.' During your exploration, you may also encounter the local Anatolian *yılkı* wild horses freely roaming the terrain. Horseback riding can offer an unparalleled view of the region's stunning beauty. To this end, Cappadocia features many daily horseback tours and multi-day treks to choose from.

A True Hidden Gem for Cyclists

Cappadocia's mystic and undulating landscape is ideal for an active adventure steeped in history. The region's volcanic valleys here provide enticing single trails and gravel cycling routes where you can pause to appreciate the fairy chimneys and cave chapels galore.

3 MORE MUST-DO EXPERIENCES

Wine Tastings

The region holds a well-established winemaking tradition dating back thousands of years. The renowned regional variety of *Emir* and other Anatolian grapes like *Narince*, *Öküzgözü*, *Kalecik Karası* and *Boğazkere* grow in abundance thanks to the rich soil of the region.

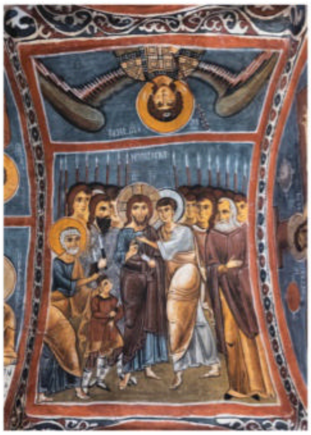
Local Delicacies

A good number of restaurants, many with scenic terraces, serve specialties like *testi kebabı* (meat cooked in a sealed clay pot), *mezes* (hot and cold appetizers), *dolmas* (stuffed vegetables and vine leaves) and *mantı* (Turkish dumplings), as well as pumpkin dessert with walnuts.

Music Festivals

Cappadocia's otherworldly locale has played host to several noted electronic and classical music events and festivals. Just be sure to check the local calendar before your visit.

Frescoes of Dark Church in Göreme



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25 Places To Visit In 2025

Edited by Anna Banas, Sarika Bansal, Ellen Carpenter, Tim Chester, and Billie Cohen

Illustrations by Eleanor Shakespeare

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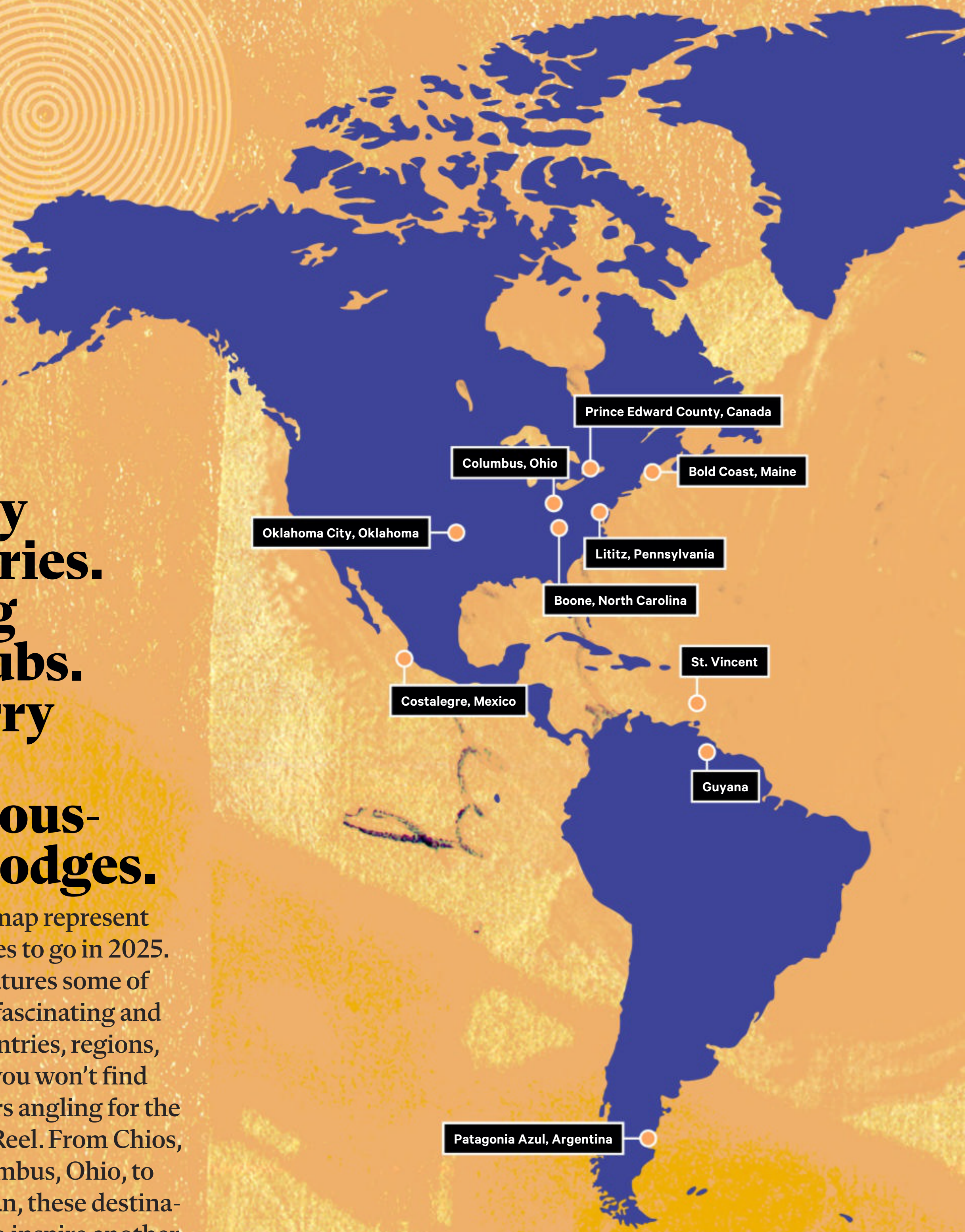
Dark sky sanctuaries. Floating nightclubs. Blueberry farms. Indigenous-owned lodges.

The dots on this map represent Afar's top 25 places to go in 2025. This year's list features some of the world's most fascinating and lesser-visited countries, regions, and cities where you won't find crowds of travelers angling for the same Instagram Reel. From Chios, Greece, and Columbus, Ohio, to Guyana and Jordan, these destinations are bound to inspire another year of joyful and intentional travel. Where will you go first?


Prince Edward County, Canada
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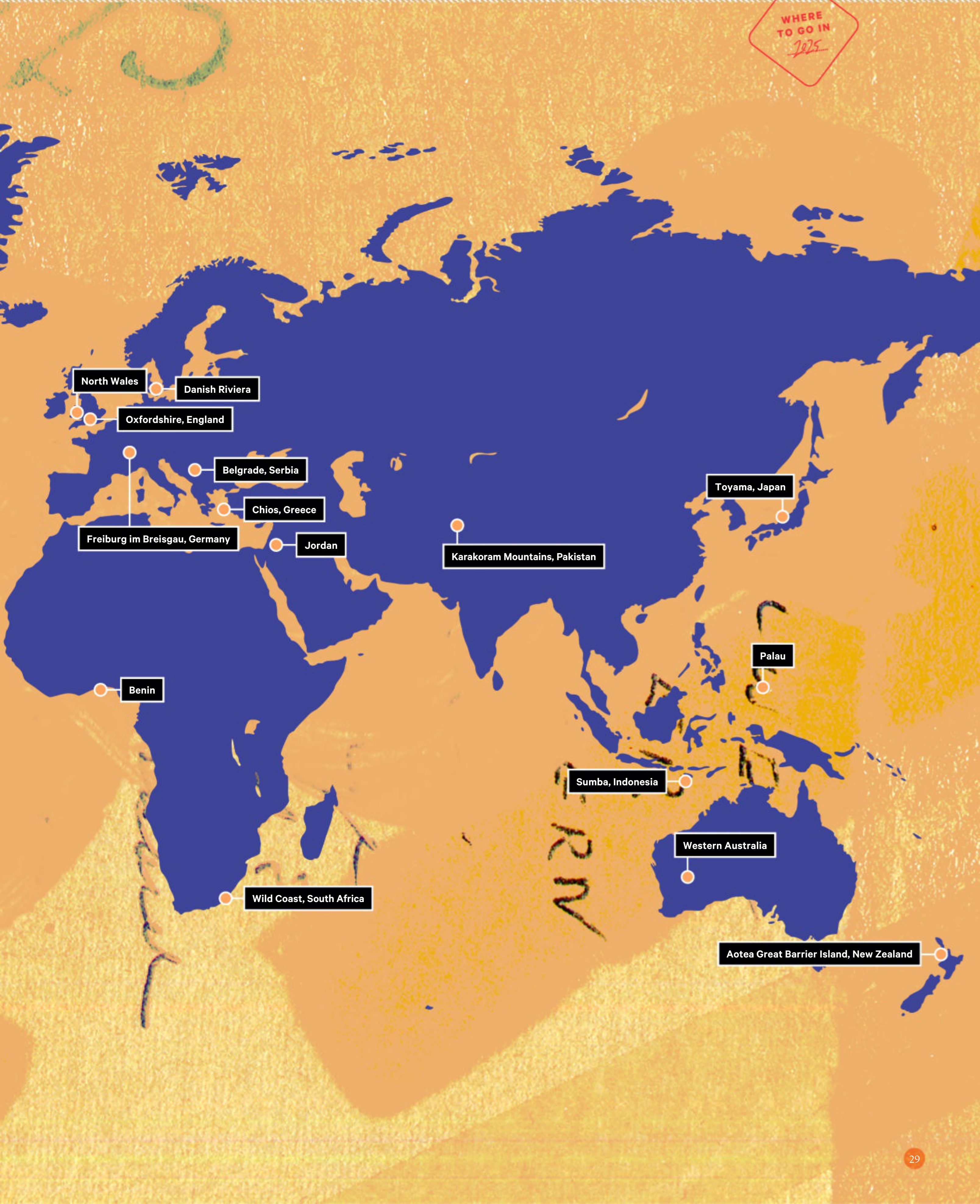
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
Lititz, Pennsylvania
Boone, North Carolina
St. Vincent
Costalegre, Mexico
Guyana
Patagonia Azul, Argentina


North Wales
Danish Riviera
Oxfordshire, England
Belgrade, Serbia
Chios, Greece
Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany
Jordan
Karakoram Mountains, Pakistan
Toyama, Japan
Palau
Benin
Sumba, Indonesia
Western Australia
Wild Coast, South Africa
Aotea Great Barrier Island, New Zealand

Aotea Great Barrier Island, New Zealand

This Pacific island is a nature lover's paradise, where residents live off the grid and the stars shine brightly above them. by Laura Dannen Redman

The Milky Way dazzles above Medlands Beach.

JAMES RUA

SIXTY MILES northeast of Auckland (New Zealand's largest city) is nature's guardian: the secluded, forested Great Barrier Island. The 110-square-mile isle, known by the Maori name Aotea, is graced with high, craggy cliffs and long white-sand surf beaches that shelter the mainland from the Pacific Ocean's many moods. The majority of its land comprises a wildlife reserve of wetlands and old-growth kauri forests; endangered species such as the *pāteke* (the fourth-rarest duck in the world) live here free of predators.

The island's businesses and roughly 1,200 full-time residents are deeply committed to conservation. Aoteans live entirely off-grid—meaning all the eco-lodges and apartment rentals, breweries and bakeries, generate their own power from solar and wind, harvest their own rainwater, and aim for zero waste. Don't expect to step into a café and march back out with a coffee, either; Aoteans would prefer you linger over a flat white in a ceramic mug, and if you must take it to go, bring your own reusable cup.

In exchange for leaving no trace, visitors can partake of what locals have long experienced: the inside track to thermal hot springs, bottlenose-dolphin coves, scuba diving sites, and snapper fishing. And because Aotea is so blissfully remote, with so little light pollution, stars seem to envelop it at night.

Aotea was declared an International Dark Sky Sanctuary in 2017—the first such designation in New Zealand. Now, it's a prime viewing site for the current solar maximum, the once-a-decade opportunity to see the planet's auroras at their most vibrant, predicted to last through early 2026. The southern lights, or aurora australis, are no less thrilling than their northern counterpart, especially with such capable guides as Star Treks, led by an Aotea native and Dark Sky ambassador, or women-run Good Heavens, pointing out the glory of Tahu-nui-ā-Rangi, or "great glowing sky."

Where to stay
175° East's three private luxury homes (including one "treehouse") share 14 hilltop acres with sea views. It's an eight-minute walk to Medlands Beach and a short drive to the townships of Claris and Tryphena.

Belgrade, Serbia

The Balkan metropolis entices travelers with a thriving nightlife scene and a bevy of inventive restaurants. by Tim Chester

BELGRADE'S HISTORY is sketched on its skyline. Stand by the ancient Ottoman stronghold of Belgrade Fortress in the Old Town, where the Danube meets the Sava River, and scan the horizon. You'll see a confluence of cultures and epochs: communist-era housing blocks and brutalist skyscrapers in New Belgrade dating to the 1960s and '70s, and the ochre-tiled roofs of the former Austro-Hungarian riverside town of Zemun. The erstwhile capital of Yugoslavia was a crucial crossroads of Balkan trade, and its enduring blend of Slavic East and cosmopolitan West is most accessible in its food and music.

I visited last summer and found several restaurants that could give those in Paris or New York a run for their money—suitably, given that the city has had a Michelin guide since 2021. Standout dishes included *teletina ispod sača* (veal and potatoes roasted in a clay pot) at Bela Reka in New Belgrade, where ingredients are sourced from the restaurant's farm in the Homolje mountains, and crispy suckling pig that paired perfectly with cava at Pretop, an unassuming spot in the Zemun market. I also explored a nightlife scene akin to that of East London at the Cetinjska complex, an arts and culture hub, and found craft beer aplenty all across the city (a highlight being the cherry sour at Docker Brewery in the Gastrošor district).

It was at the more traditional *kafanas*, or pubs, though, that I created lasting memories of Belgrade. I spent an evening at Gradimir Kafana, where boisterous diners sang along to live accordion- and fiddle-driven folk songs at tables laden with breads, salads, and *ćevapčići* (mixed grilled meat). A few shots of the ubiquitous rakia fruit brandy later, I made my way to the river, where dozens of the capital's famous floating nightclubs known as *splavs* were blasting out a blend of Serbian pop, "turbofolk" (a techno and folk mash-up), and contemporary Western dance music for energetic crowds. Their beats mingled in the air—a remixed, and very apt, soundtrack for the city.

Make it happen
A trip with Belgrade-based Yugotour takes you around what they call "the capital of a country that doesn't exist anymore" in a tiny vintage Zastava car (aka a Yugo). See brutalist architecture, a former Nazi concentration camp, the mausoleum of Yugoslavia's longtime leader, Josip Broz Tito, and more.

Where to stay
Located in the historic quarter, Square Nine has 45 wood-paneled rooms and suites, a rooftop Japanese restaurant, and a spa with a 59-foot lap pool.

ALGIRDAS BAKAS (8); NATALIYA NAZAROVA, E2DAN (SHUTTERSTOCK)

WE'RE NOT JUST PRETTY SKI HILLS (BUT WE ARE THAT TOO).

If you want to go somewhere for winter, go somewhere that celebrates the winter season for all of its beauty. Somewhere that will give you outdoor adventures that go beyond the expected—from adrenaline thrills to spa-level chills. Go somewhere like...oh, I don't know, Canada?

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SUN PEAKS

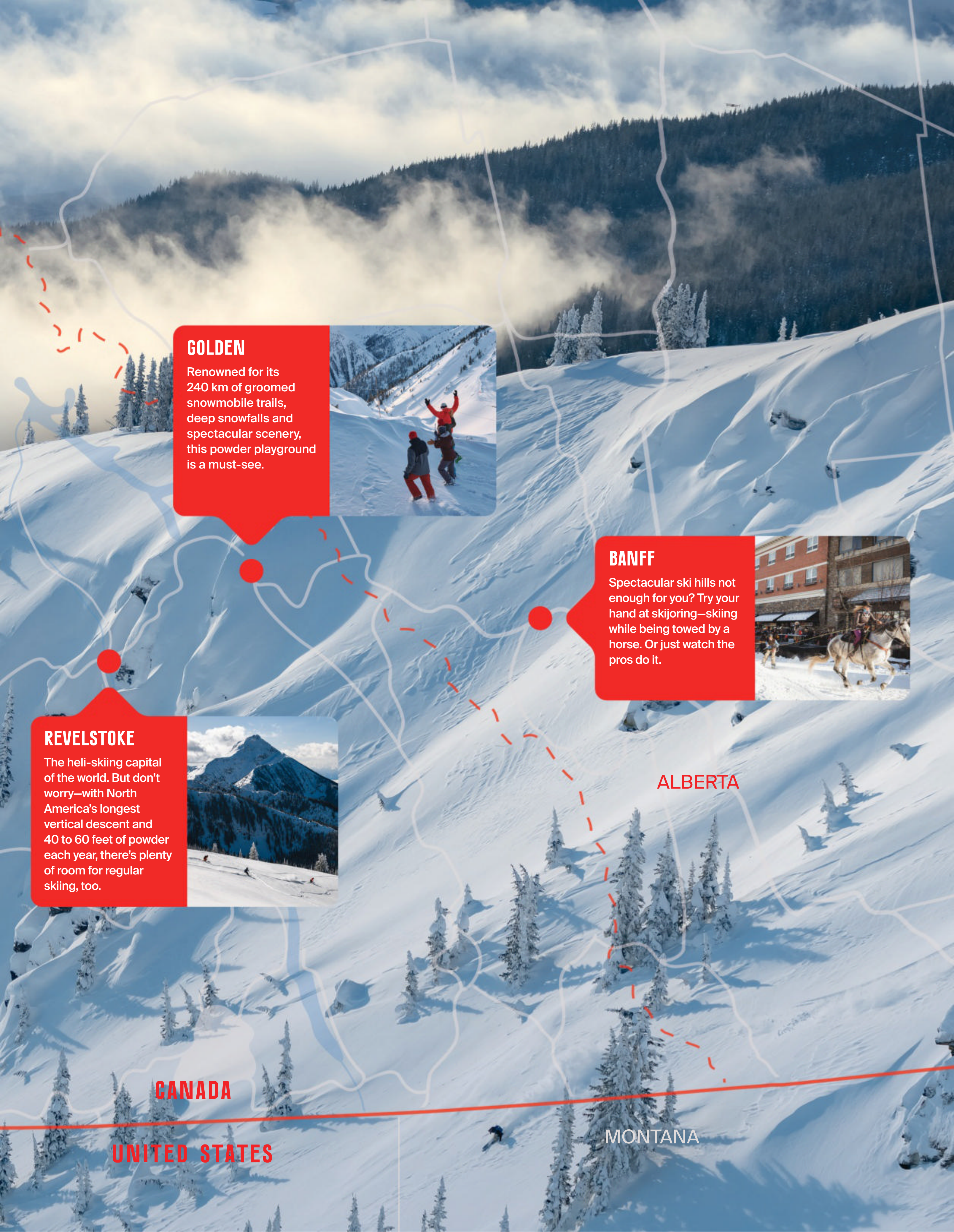
Forget your car keys — Sun Peaks charming Alpine village is completely ski-through and pedestrian-friendly, making it a family favourite.

WHISTLER

Don't escape the cold — embrace it with an immersive thermal hot and cold journey at the Scandinave Spa, all while surrounded by nature.

VANCOUVER

Worked up an appetite from winter activities? Experience memorable and enchanting new flavors at one of the multiple Michelin-starred restaurants in this bustling seaport.



GOLDEN

Renowned for its 240 km of groomed snowmobile trails, deep snowfalls and spectacular scenery, this powder playground is a must-see.

BANFF

Spectacular ski hills not enough for you? Try your hand at skijoring—skiing while being towed by a horse. Or just watch the pros do it.

REVELSTOKE

The heli-skiing capital of the world. But don't worry—with North America's longest vertical descent and 40 to 60 feet of powder each year, there's plenty of room for regular skiing, too.

WHERE
TO GO IN
2025

St. Vincent

Long overlooked for glitzier Caribbean locales, the island beckons with its idyllic beaches and abundant marine life—and more flights than ever.

by Heather Greenwood Davis

THERE ARE 32 islands and cays that make up the country of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and for years St. Vincent served as little more than a stopover for travelers on their way to celeb-favorite isles such as Mustique and Bequia. Accommodations were limited, and flights often required a connection in Barbados or St. Lucia. Now, direct flights from the U.S. and the U.K. and a new Sandals resort are helping make the 133-square-mile volcanic island a destination in its own right.

St. Vincent has always been a stunner; the Indigenous Caribs originally called it Hairoun, which means "land of the blessed." Jungle-like ferns, bougainvillea, and pink-blossomed Soufrière trees carpet the undulating terrain (the capital, Kingstown, boasts the oldest botanical garden in the Western Hemisphere), while the turquoise waters harbor coral reefs, eagle rays, vividly colored angelfish, and sea turtles that delight divers and snorkelers. For beautiful views of the coast and (on a clear day) surrounding islands, travelers and locals hike up La Soufrière volcano, the highest peak in St. Vincent. Be warned that the volcano is active—it last erupted in 2021, causing severe property damage—but the trek remains popular.

In Kingstown, market stalls are piled high with local produce such as jackfruit and soursop. At Vee Jay's Restaurant and Bar, an island staple for 47 years, a bowl of shrimp and conch *souse* (a brothy seafood soup) is the dish to order. Fans of *Pirates of the Caribbean* can take a tour to see filming locations including Wallilabou Bay and the hotel Wallilabou Anchorage, which preserved much of the set from 2003. They may not find gold doubloons, but they will definitely treasure their time in St. Vincent.

Only in St. Vincent
Each December, Vincentians celebrate the Nine Mornings Festival with dances, games, plays, and steel drum performances all taking place in the early hours of the nine days leading up to Christmas. In the summer, revelers take to the streets for Vincy Mas, the island's annual carnival. Expect soca and calypso bands, parades, elaborate feathered and beaded costumes, and a pageant to crown a king and queen.

JULES NGUYEN (3); DIANA DE LORENZI

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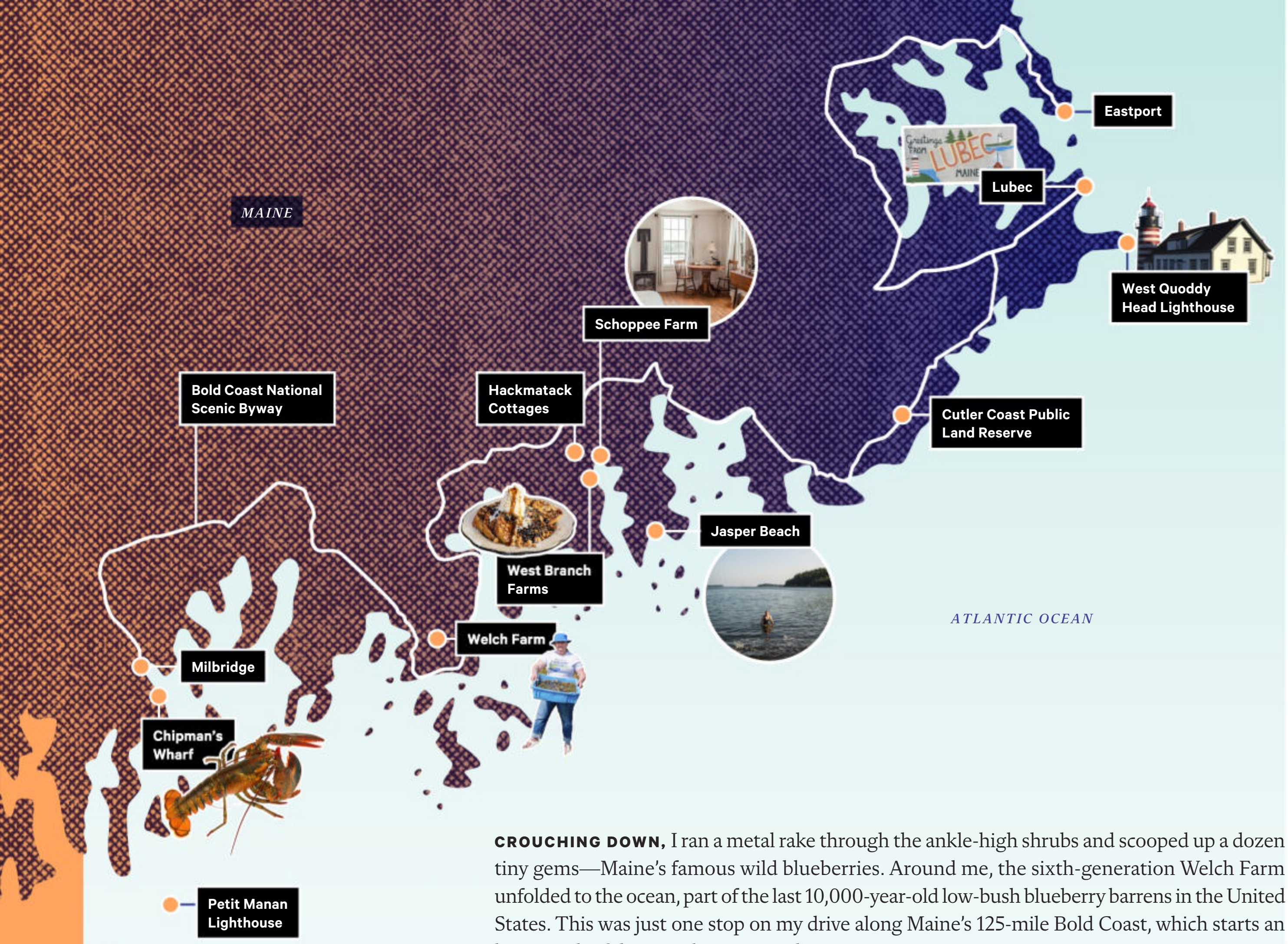

WHERE TO GO IN 2025

Bold Coast, Maine

A drive along this national scenic byway leads to wild blueberry farms, lobster boats, seaside cliffs, and farm-to-table restaurants.

by Anna Fiorentino

CROUCHING DOWN, I ran a metal rake through the ankle-high shrubs and scooped up a dozen tiny gems—Maine's famous wild blueberries. Around me, the sixth-generation Welch Farm unfolded to the ocean, part of the last 10,000-year-old low-bush blueberry barrens in the United States. This was just one stop on my drive along Maine's 125-mile Bold Coast, which starts an hour north of the crowds in Bar Harbor.

This less-trammeled part of the state is filled with jagged peninsulas and uninhabited islands. (Maine has more islands than any other state in the U.S.) The best way to experience it is by following the Bold Coast National Scenic Byway, which spans from Milbridge to the town of Eastport.

I began my trip, appropriately for Maine, on the water—with a wildlife boat tour in Milbridge led by lobsterman Jamie Robertson of Atlantic Edge Adventures. He idled so we could watch a bald eagle perch on Petit Manan Lighthouse and see the summer's last puffins migrating out to sea. Robertson also leads lobster-fishing excursions. After we got back on land, I ate a lobster roll at Chipman's Wharf, a restaurant owned by another lobsterman who prides himself on having his seafood delivered right to the dock.

There's more to the local bounty here than crustaceans and blueberries, though. Save room for French-inspired fare at Flora by chef Ross Florance, formerly of New York City's Per Se and Le Bernardin, who fell in love with Maine after visiting as a kid. His restaurant in Machias is set in a 200-year-old former dairy barn at Schoppee Farm, which now cultivates and sells organic hemp products.

A little farther north is the Cutler Coast Public Land reserve, where a network of trails winds through 12,000 protected acres along the Atlantic Ocean. Cap off your trip with the candy cane–striped West Quoddy Head Lighthouse in Lubec, which overlooks the Bay of Fundy just over the Canadian border.

Where to stay

The Inn at Schoppee Farm, in a red farmhouse from the 1800s, has four rooms on a bank of the Machias River. It's situated along the 87-mile Sunrise Trail, which rambles through forests and marshes, past moose and wild turkeys.

Also in Machias are the Hackmatack Cottages, 12 rustic and refined cabins with firepits and fully stocked kitchens. The new accommodations are located inside West Branch Farms, whose restaurant, the Public House, draws from its vegetable garden. Visitors can go on kayaking and fishing adventures while enjoying the pastoral environs.

AMY WELCH-OLSON (4); MICHELLE HEIMERMAN (2); ND700 (SHUTTERSTOCK)

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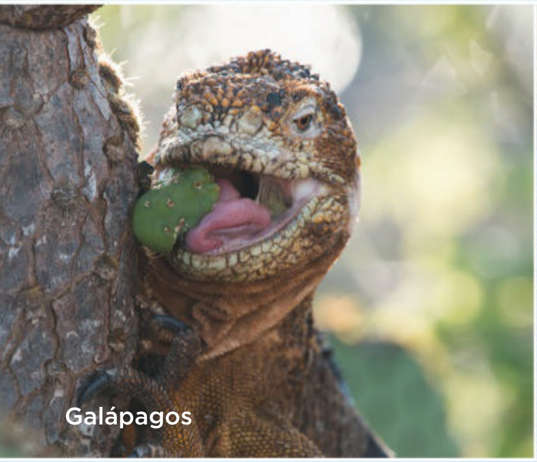
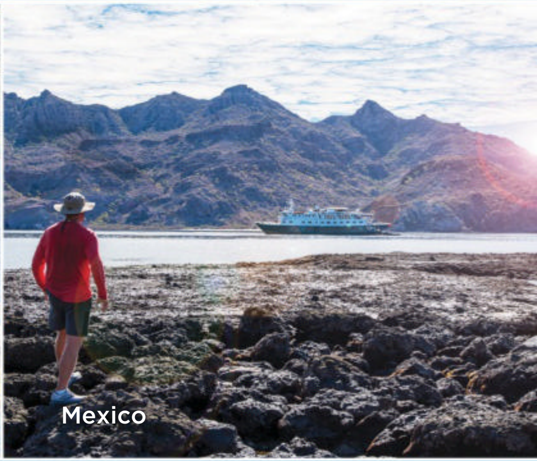
Alaska



Galápagos

Hawaii



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Costalegre, Mexico

The "happy coast" lives up to its name thanks to pristine nature and deliberate attempts to keep it that way.

by Kathryn Romeyn

WHERE TO GO IN 2025

Cliffside suites at the Four Seasons Tamarindo look out over the Pacific Ocean.

IN THE STATE of Jalisco, north of the port city of Manzanillo and south of tourist-thronged Puerto Vallarta, lies Costalegre, Mexico's "happy coast." The 200-mile expanse of sugary sand is bordered by dense jungle, protected estuaries, and sea turtle sanctuaries, juxtaposed with the peaks and valleys of the Sierra Madre mountains.

It's a rare feeling to be able to snorkel, hike, fish, and swim in this natural setting, which has been balancing the challenge of becoming slightly less remote (thanks to the upcoming Chalacatepec airport and new resorts) with an effort to conserve the things that make it so wondrous in the first place.

Several private owners of the region's oceanfront property are putting Mother Earth first by developing only a small fraction of their biodiverse land. In 2022, the 157-room Four Seasons Resort Tamarindo opened on a private reserve with a biologist on staff and a sizable farm. Sixty miles north, Xala, an upscale resort and residential development, has initiated a "Ridge to Reef" project that aims to rehabilitate 62 miles of coastline as a refuge for Costalegre's endangered sea turtles. In 2026, it will unveil a collection of 51 Six Senses villas along the Pacific.

"There is a shared and unwavering commitment to the preservation of [Costalegre's] natural landscapes among those who live here," says Four Seasons Tamarindo's resident biologist, Francisco "Paco" Javier León González, who also teaches land preservation at the surrounding schools. In leading by example, Costalegre's developers are broadcasting a new global standard for coastal development in an area that has been, until now, a beautiful secret.

Make it happen
Luxury travel company Journey Mexico designs personalized trips to Costalegre with insider experiences. Hike to the petroglyphs and waterfalls of Cajón de Peñas, learn to surf, go deep-sea fishing, or relax on a yacht cruise.

Only in Costalegre
The region is biodiversity central: There are more than 70 endemic species of flora and fauna on the Four Seasons preserve alone.

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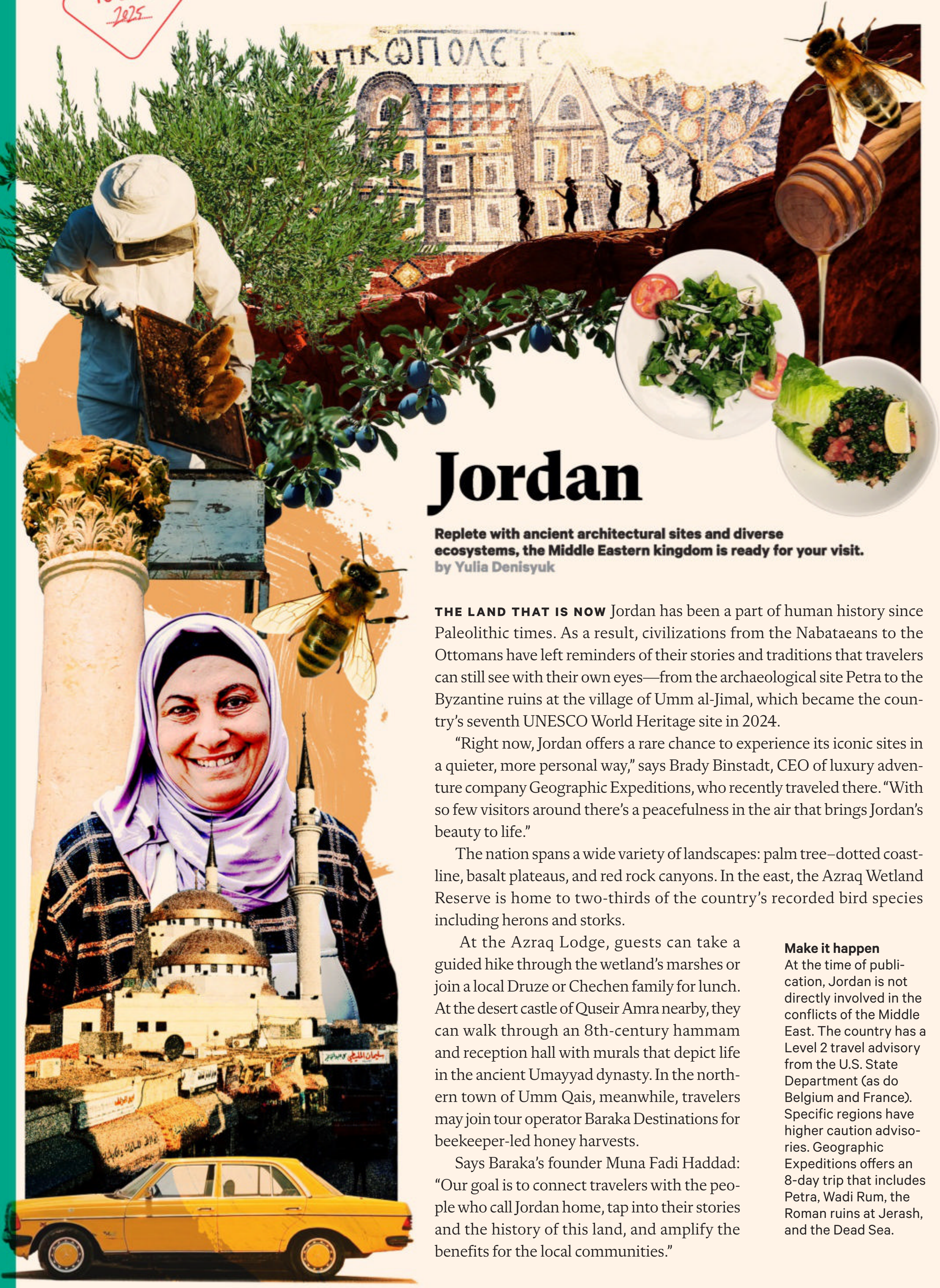


Jordan

Replete with ancient architectural sites and diverse ecosystems, the Middle Eastern kingdom is ready for your visit.

by Yulia Denisyuk

THE LAND THAT IS NOW Jordan has been a part of human history since Paleolithic times. As a result, civilizations from the Nabataeans to the Ottomans have left reminders of their stories and traditions that travelers can still see with their own eyes—from the archaeological site Petra to the Byzantine ruins at the village of Umm al-Jimal, which became the country's seventh UNESCO World Heritage site in 2024.

"Right now, Jordan offers a rare chance to experience its iconic sites in a quieter, more personal way," says Brady Binstadt, CEO of luxury adventure company Geographic Expeditions, who recently traveled there. "With so few visitors around there's a peacefulness in the air that brings Jordan's beauty to life."

The nation spans a wide variety of landscapes: palm tree–dotted coastline, basalt plateaus, and red rock canyons. In the east, the Azraq Wetland Reserve is home to two-thirds of the country's recorded bird species including herons and storks.

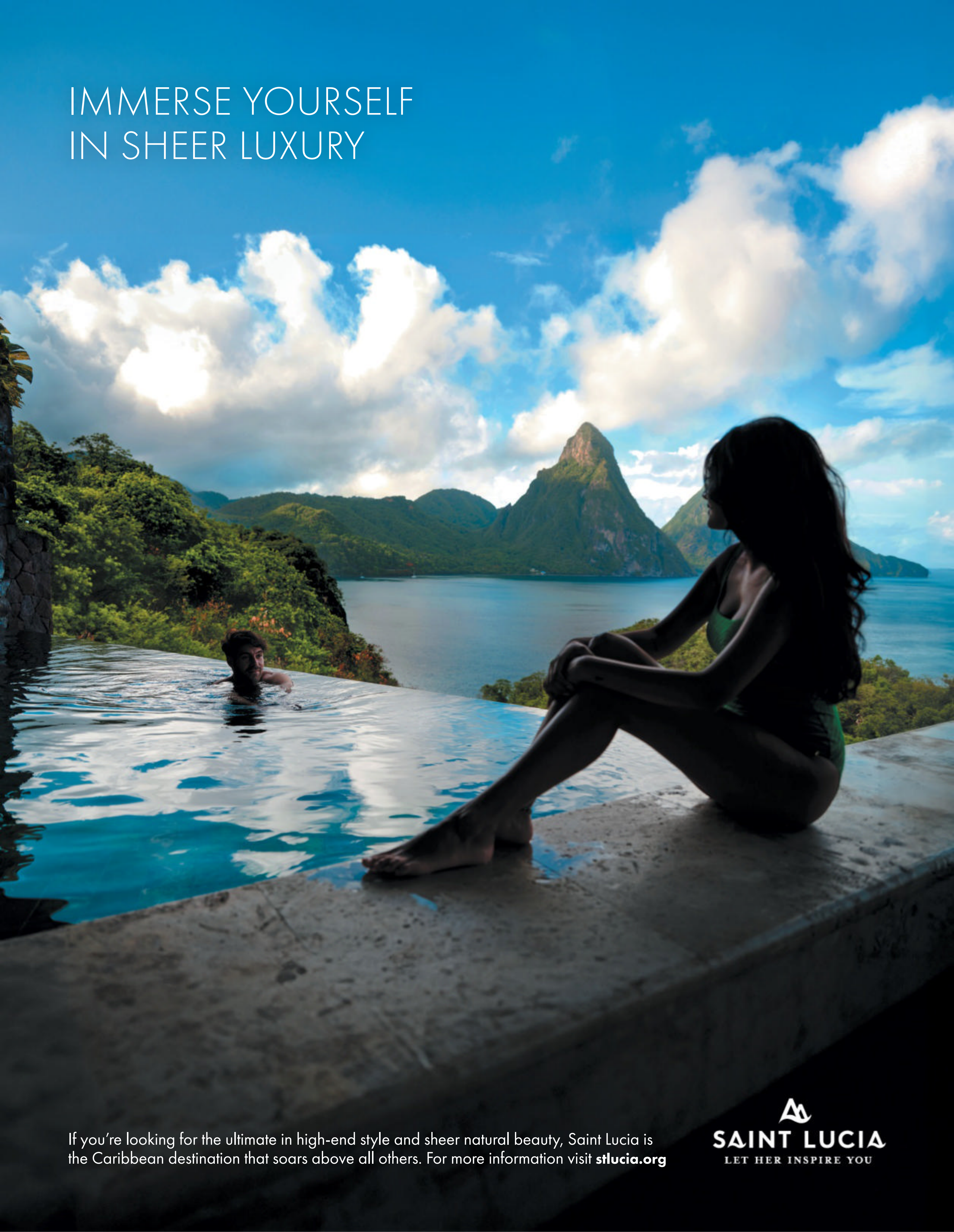
At the Azraq Lodge, guests can take a guided hike through the wetland's marshes or join a local Druze or Chechen family for lunch. At the desert castle of Quseir Amra nearby, they can walk through an 8th-century hammam and reception hall with murals that depict life in the ancient Umayyad dynasty. In the northern town of Umm Qais, meanwhile, travelers may join tour operator Baraka Destinations for beekeeper-led honey harvests.

Says Baraka's founder Muna Fadi Haddad: "Our goal is to connect travelers with the people who call Jordan home, tap into their stories and the history of this land, and amplify the benefits for the local communities."

Make it happen

At the time of publication, Jordan is not directly involved in the conflicts of the Middle East. The country has a Level 2 travel advisory from the U.S. State Department (as do Belgium and France). Specific regions have higher caution advisories. Geographic Expeditions offers an 8-day trip that includes Petra, Wadi Rum, the Roman ruins at Jerash, and the Dead Sea.

DELBO ANDREA, ASTUDIO, AHMAD A ATWAH, DANIEL PRUDEK, MARCOBRIVIO.PHOTOGRAPHY (SHUTTERSTOCK); INDEPENDENT PICTURE SERVICE (ALAMY); JESS TODD; ALEX CRÉTEY SYSTERMANS (3); YULIA DENISYUK; ALI BARQAWI STUDIOS



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Columbus, Ohio

Fueled by a diverse population, the fastest-growing metro area in the U.S. is buzzing with history, art, and food. by Katherine LaGrave

I'D NEVER REALLY considered Columbus until a friend implored me to visit. *Come!* she said. *It has everything.* I chalked up her passion to hyperbole but booked a flight anyway. Over a long weekend, I got to see that *everything* wasn't too much of a stretch.

The Ohio capital counts more than 175 entries on the National Register of Historic Places, including the German Village district. One morning, we strolled past its biergartens and 19th-century brick cottages before joining the line at the bakery Pistacia Vera for chocolate-pistachio cookies. Down the street, we packed our baskets with literature inside the maze-like 32-room Book Loft, which is one of Columbus's many independent bookstores—and one of the most sizable in the country. The city has been home to celebrated contemporary writers (Hanif Abdurraqib, Saeed Jones, and Maggie Smith, to name a few) and a new-as-of-2023 annual summer book festival, adding to its reputation as a burgeoning literary destination.

Where to stay
Decked out in scarlet, the pet-friendly, 171-room Graduate hotel by Hilton is designed as an homage to Ohio State University, which is located a mere mile away. Bike rentals and an on-property Shake Shack sweeten the stay.

On the way to the 19th-century Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, our driver mirrored my friend's enthusiasm about the city: *Did I know that Columbus is the Midwest's second-largest city after Chicago, with a population hovering near 1 million, including some of the largest Somali, Nepalese-Bhutanese, and LGBTQ communities in the country?*

There's much to be said about Columbus as a dining destination, too: Avishar Barua of Agni and Joya's was a 2024 James Beard semifinalist in the Best Chef category. The nearly 150-year-old North Market has more than 30 vendors selling everything from Tibetan *momo* dumplings to buckeye doughnuts (filled with peanut butter, dipped in chocolate). Luckily for us travelers, Columbus is within a day's drive of every major Midwest city, and a 90-minute flight from New York or D.C.

AMY GLASS

Danish Riviera

The country's quiet North Zealand coast is an ecofriendly beach vacation spot best experienced on two wheels.

by Lisa Abend

DANES WILL BE the first to tell you that the Danish Riviera is nothing like its more famous Mediterranean namesake. But what it lacks in movie-star glamour and predictable sunshine, the North Zealand coast makes up for in tidy little towns, windswept beaches edged with wild roses, and a relaxed, wholesome charm that is the embodiment of Scandinavian summer. And because it's just 90 minutes by train from Copenhagen, and easily traversed by bike once you're there (rentals are common), this region makes for one of the more carefree—and environmentally friendly—beach holidays in northern Europe.

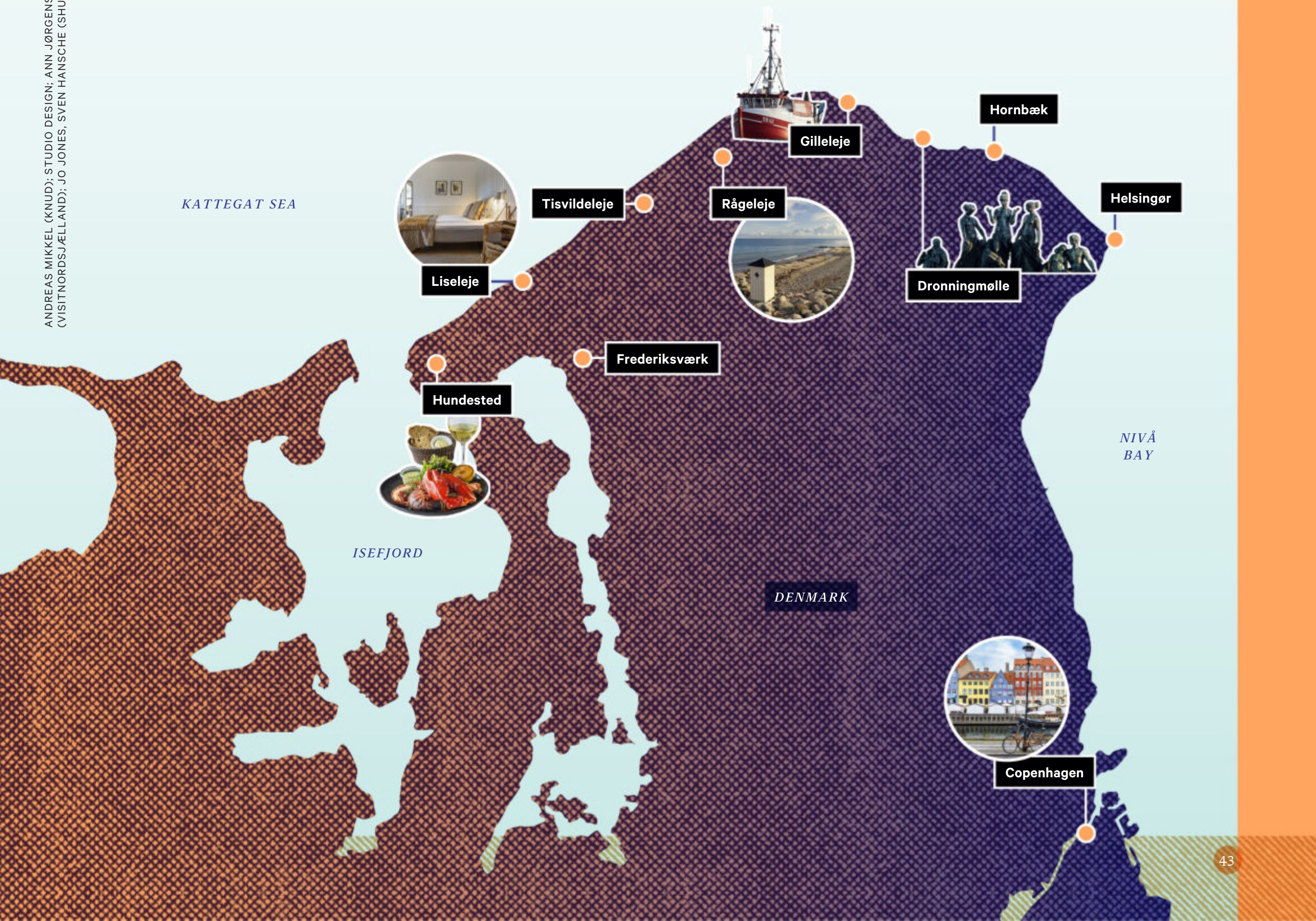
Extending some 125 miles across the northern tip of Zealand, from Hundested in the west to Hornbæk or Helsingør (definitions differ) in the east, the Danish Riviera became a popular vacation destination for Copenhageners in the 1930s, once beach-bound trains were more common. To fully experience the area's nostalgic spirit, check into a seaside *badehotel* (bathing hotel). There's one in nearly every coastal town, most dating from the turn of the 20th century but with modern amenities. Once settled, find the nearest bike path. Wide trails run along the scenic coast, connecting one town to the next. Don't miss a visit to the dramatic sculpture garden of the Rudolph Tegner Museum in Dronningmølle. Also worth a stop: the busy fishing harbor of Gilleleje and the candy-striped beach huts of Rågeleje. Locally minded restaurants are bountiful, such as the cozy Tinggården in Frederiksværk, which grows herbs in its own garden, and the lively bistro Knud in Hundested, where you can try mussels straight from Isefjord. And, of course, there are the beaches, with dunes that go on for miles and that, unlike Cannes or Antibes, almost never get packed.

Where to stay
Helenekilde Badehotel in Tisvildeleje and Liseleje Badehotel in Liseleje are historic properties with simple yet elegant rooms.

Stay longer
Shakespeare fans should visit Helsingør, on the eastern edge of the Danish Riviera. Kronborg, the imposing 15th-century castle that supposedly inspired *Hamlet*, can be found here. Now a UNESCO World Heritage site, it has hosted performances of the play most summers since 1937.

Make it happen
To experience the Danish Riviera from the sea, take a kayak tour around Liseleje and Hundested with Frederiksværk-based Comfort Adventures.

ANDREAS MIKKEL (KNUD); STUDIO DESIGN; ANN JØRGENSEN, TINE UFFELMANN (VISITNORDSJÆLLAND); JO JONES, SVEN HANSCHE (SHUTTERSTOCK)



Only eight of Palau's 340 islands are inhabited.

Palau

Conservation is part of the national DNA in this biodiverse archipelago, where visitors sign a pledge to act responsibly during their stay. by Terry Ward

AT THE EDGE of the Coral Triangle region in the Western Pacific Ocean, the waters of Palau—an archipelago of 340 islands southeast of the Philippines—are the habitat of sharks, turtles, manta rays, and more than 2,000 types of reef fish. "It's like an underwater Serengeti," says marine biologist Ron Leidich, owner of Paddling Palau, which offers day tours as well as overnight kayaking-and-camping expeditions into marine lakes and shallow bays. "The confluence of the Pacific and Indian oceans has created an evolutionary soup, producing a bewildering diversity of marine species over glacial epochs."

Conservation is core to the nation. Its Palau Pledge, launched in 2017, was drafted by island children and requires visitors to sign a stamp in their passport upon entry, promising "to act in an ecologically and culturally responsible way" while in the country. Palau has preserved its natural wonders, including the UNESCO World Heritage site Rock Islands Southern Lagoon (with a reef system that supports more than 385 coral species).

When Four Seasons launched its 11-cabin catamaran *Explorer* in October 2023, the company collaborated with Palauan authorities to support those sustainability efforts. Passengers can attend talks by a marine biologist, go birding with a Palau Conservation Society naturalist, and support local businesses through various excursions to waterfalls, Palauan heritage museums, and World War II memorial sites. Snorkeling and paddling trips take off right from the ship, too, which operates as a floating hotel with a spa, gourmet meals, and cakes and espresso during breaks from diving.

Where to stay
Gaze out at the Rock Islands from an overwater bungalow at Palau Pacific Resort, which has a white sand beach, or consider Palasia Hotel in the heart of the city of Koror, located within walking distance of restaurants and shops.

Only in Palau
Palauan culture has traditionally been matrilineal. Women have historically had authority over land and been responsible for finances.

KILIII YUYAN

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Guyana

See some of the world's rarest wildlife in the rainforests and savannas of this fast-changing South American country.

by Nicholas DeRenzo

WHERE TO GO IN 2025

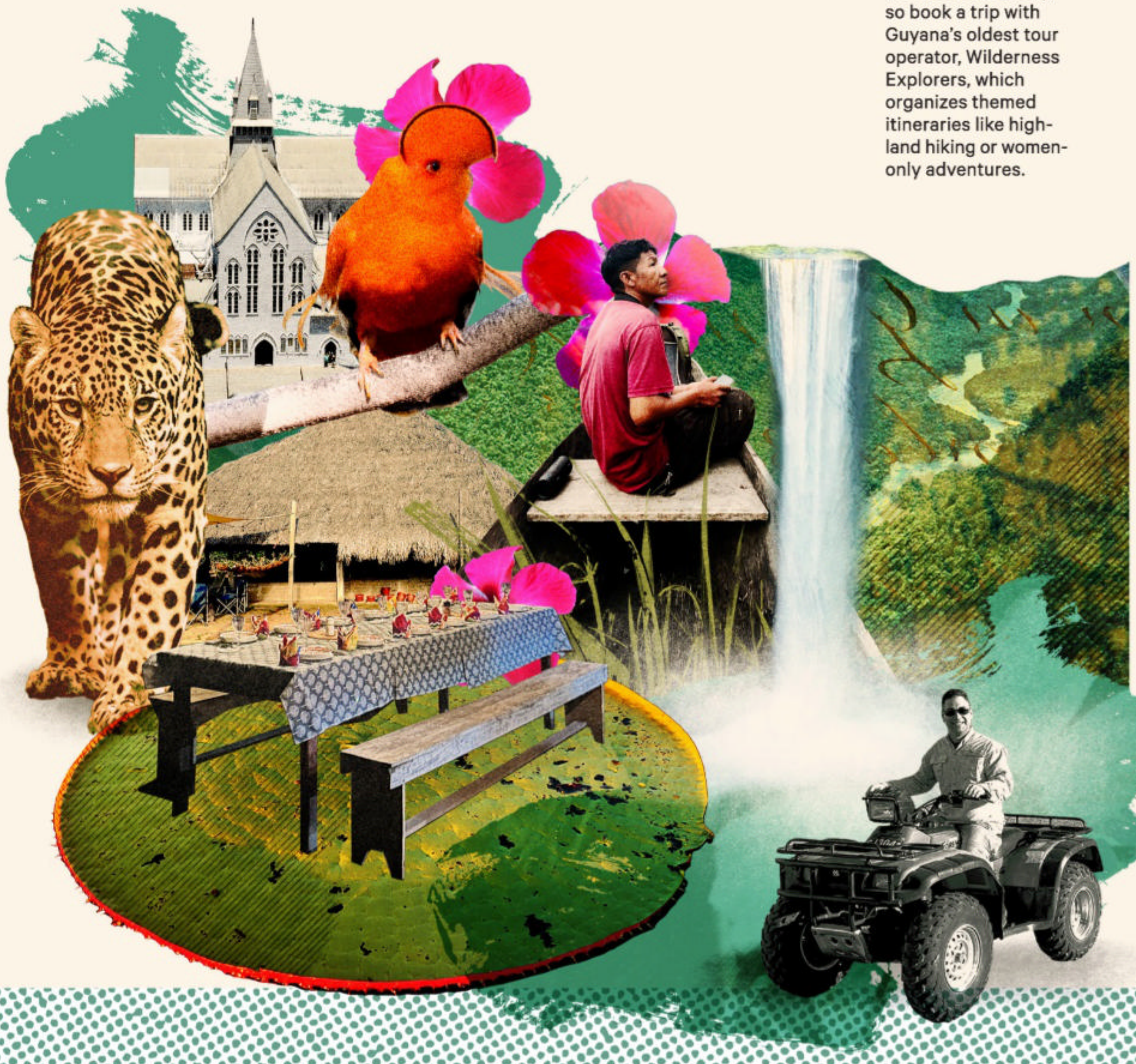
GUYANA IS A place on the brink of big things: A decade since 11 billion barrels of oil were discovered offshore, it has had the world's fastest-growing economy for two years running. That means new direct flights and boomtown construction in its capital, Georgetown. But the nation—located on the northern coast of South America, with cultural ties to the Caribbean—is forging a sustainable path ahead by investing in renewable energy (free solar panels for Indigenous communities) and improving rural infrastructure (increased internet access, better roads).

To get the truest sense of its ecotourism potential, leave behind the bustling coast, where 90 percent of the country's roughly 800,000 people live, and head to the Rupununi savanna, near the Brazilian border and across from the Amazon rainforest. Accessible by air or a single, semipaved road from Georgetown, the area is known for such biological behemoths as jaguars, giant anteaters, anacondas, and *Victoria amazonica* lily pads that can grow as large as 10 feet wide.

Peppering the region are off-grid lodges—many Indigenous owned or operated and some connected by the Rupununi River. At Caiman House, naturalists from Yupukari, a Macushi village, lead nighttime excursions to track and tag massive black caimans, a crocodilian reptile native to South America. At the Atta Rainforest Lodge, guests can climb 10 stories into the canopy on rope bridges for a chance to spot birds such as the cock-of-the-rock, which is traffic cone–orange. Come 2025, it will be 70 years since a young David Attenborough came to Guyana to film a series about exotic animals. He stayed at Karanambu Lodge, a former cattle ranch where the digs are still rustic (don't mind the bats in your rafters), the hospitality is warm (fresh-caught river fish is served under mango trees glittering with strings of lights), and fellow guests might include orphaned giant otter pups being rehabilitated on-site.

Only in Guyana
At 741 feet high, Kaieteur Falls is the largest single-drop waterfall in the world—about four times taller than Niagara Falls. Located in Kaieteur National Park, it's reachable by plane or a three-day trek.

Make it happen
Transportation in the interior is tricky, so book a trip with Guyana's oldest tour operator, Wilderness Explorers, which organizes themed itineraries like highland hiking or women-only adventures.



DAVID DIGREGORIO (5); NICHOLAS DERENZO (3); HENNER DAMKE (ALAMY); GUYANA TOURISM AUTHORITY

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Toyama, Japan

Creative chefs and brewers are transforming this bayside city into a culinary hot spot that just became easier for travelers to reach. by Yukari Sakamoto

SANDWICHED BETWEEN snowcapped mountains and the Sea of Japan, Toyama has become a prime culinary destination, in part because its bay is the source for some of Japan's top seafood. And thanks to newly extended service on the Shinkansen (bullet train) from Tokyo, it's now a lot easier for visitors to get to.

Toyama has recently attracted international trailblazers such as Richard Geoffroy, the former cellar master of Dom Pérignon, who brews sake here under the brand Iwa Sake. And local chefs, such as Eiju Yunoki at Cave Yunoki and Takahiro Gejo at his eponymous sushi restaurant, create dishes with the area's quality seafood, including *nodoguro* (blackthroat sea perch), *aori ika* (bigfin reef squid), and *baigai* (a local mollusk whose name means "Japanese ivory shell"). In the Iwase district, warehouses dating to the Meiji period (1868–1912) now house Kobo Brewery, where guests can enjoy flights of Czech-style beer paired with large sausages. At neighboring Masuda Sake Brewery, fifth-generation master brewer Ryuichiro Masuda crafts Masuizumi sake.

"Toyama is blessed with the splendid nature of the Tateyama Alps and Toyama Bay—visitors can enjoy the excellent food from the sea and land," says Kazumi Masuda, a Toyama resident and the owner of English-language cooking school Tokyo Cook. "[It] also has a rich history of *shokunin* (artisans) creating woodcarvings, metalworking, glassware, *washi* paper, and lacquerware."

Visitors can admire some of this handiwork at the Glass Art Museum in Toyama City, then take the tram to the Iwase district to browse the Taizo Glass Gallery and Gaku Ceramics. Follow it up with a hearty meal and a cup of sake, and a train back to Tokyo.

Only in Toyama
Hotaru ika (firefly squid) are bioluminescent bite-size delicacies that have a bold flavor and a chewy texture.

Stay longer
Thirty miles east of Toyama, the town of Unazuki Onsen is the entryway to the Kurobe Gorge Railway, a sightseeing train that cuts across one of Japan's deepest ravines. Stay at Enraku, a ryokan inn where some rooms have open-air baths that overlook a river.

DAISY WINGATE-SAUL

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Western Australia

New Aboriginal-led experiences make engaging with one of the world's oldest living cultures more enlightening than ever. by Keith Drew

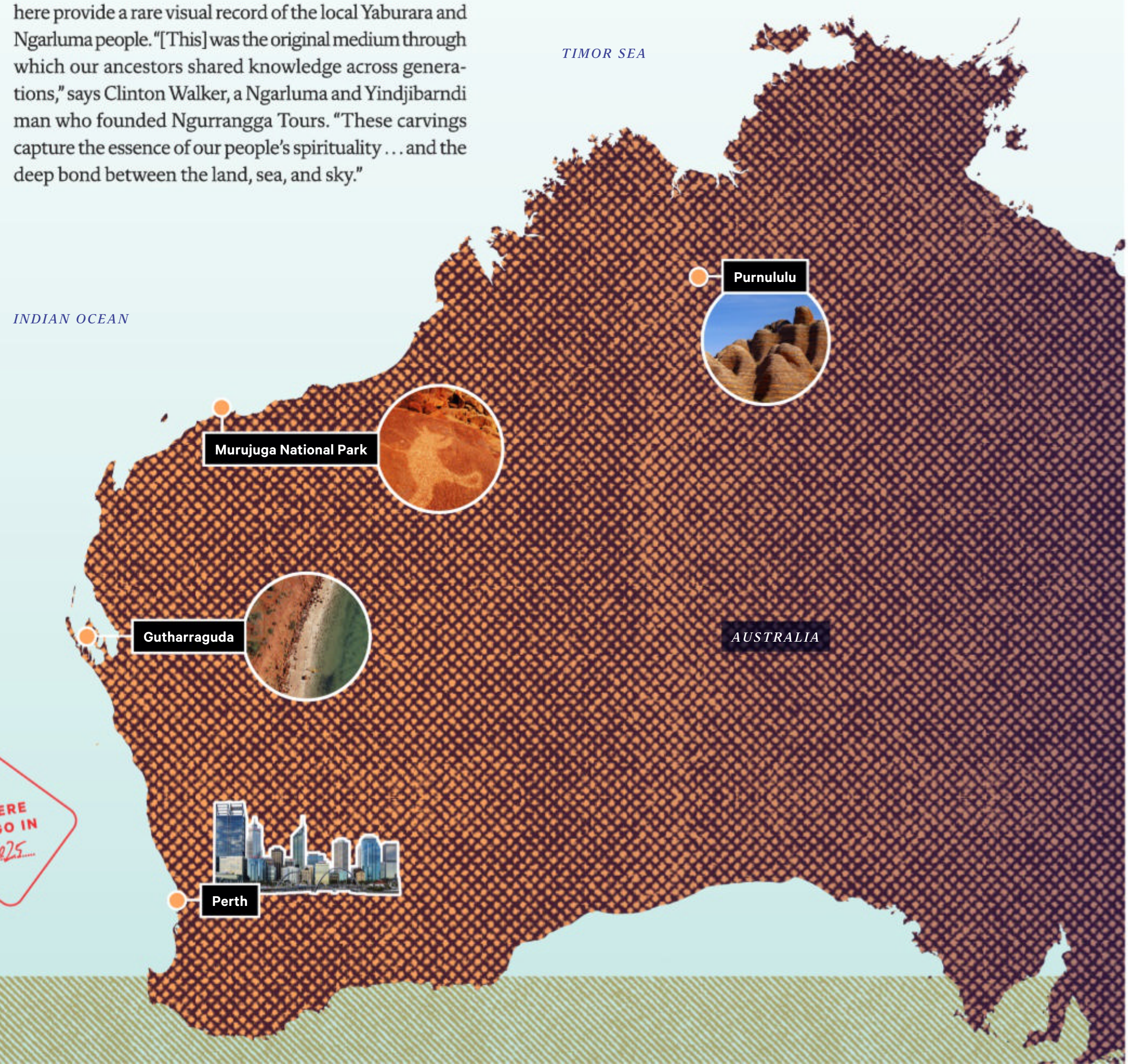
EVEN BY ANTIPODEAN standards, the state of Western Australia is huge. Were it a country, it would be the 10th largest on Earth by area, yet it has only 2.9 million residents, about 80 percent of whom live in Perth, the capital. Within its borders are forests of towering karri trees, parched deserts, and rockscapes daubed a rusty red. For more than 65,000 years, Aboriginal peoples have maintained a strong connection with these lands, passing down Dreamtime stories (origin myths) and creating songlines (like a map in song form, describing landmarks along a route).

A four-year, $20-million government initiative to create and expand Aboriginal-led experiences across Western Australia wraps up in 2025 and has already resulted in numerous ways for travelers to gain insight into one of the world's oldest living cultures. In the southwest, visitors can taste traditional Indigenous foods (such as wattle seeds and quandong, a kind of wild peach) that have been harvested according to the six seasons of the Noongar calendar; in the saltwater country of Gutharraguda, they can hike the red sand cliffs of the Wanamalu Trail with a Malgana guide; or they can head to Purnululu in the northern Kimberley region to learn about the stories of the stars with a Gija Custodian (a traditional owner and caretaker of the land).

One of the most sacred places in Western Australia is Murujuga National Park, the site of what's believed to be the highest concentration of rock art in the world. The estimated two million petroglyphs here provide a rare visual record of the local Yaburara and Ngarluma people. "[This] was the original medium through which our ancestors shared knowledge across generations," says Clinton Walker, a Ngarluma and Yindjibarndi man who founded Ngurrangga Tours. "These carvings capture the essence of our people's spirituality . . . and the deep bond between the land, sea, and sky."

Make it happen
The best way to book Indigenous-led experiences across the state is through *discoveraboriginalexperiences.com*.

Where to stay
The Ranges Karratha has 73 apartments with separate living rooms and full kitchens less than 20 miles south of Murujuga National Park. On a peninsula about 55 miles east of Murujuga, the 12-room Point Samson Resort is a five-minute walk from sandy beaches along the Indian Ocean, perfect for swimming, snorkeling, and kayaking.



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A picturesque island on Lake Ontario lures oenophiles and beachgoers alike.

by Charles Runnette

PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY IS to Torontonians what the North Fork of Long Island is to New Yorkers: a popular weekend getaway spot that's a little bit fancy and a little bit beachy, with a whole lot of wine. PEC, as the locals call it, offers farm fresh food on every menu, a thriving art scene, and a series of three sandy beaches considered among the best in Canada, with dramatic dunes that rise over 80 feet tall in some areas.

About 130 miles from Toronto on the Loyalist Parkway, PEC consists of 10 wards filled with shops, galleries, restaurants, and tasting rooms. In the small town of Picton, Base31, an arts and entertainment venue featuring emerging artists, opened in 2022 on a former World War II air base.

PEC's small batches of wines were a longtime open secret, enjoyed mostly by locals until a few vineyards caught the attention of domestic and international press. Standouts among the 40 or so small vineyards include Lighthall, which produces cool-climate pinot noirs and minerally chardonnays, and the Grange of Prince Edward, where visitors can walk into a barn that dates to the 19th century, grab a bottle of 2017 Lafontaine du Loup Rosé, and head out to picnic tables. Or, for a more formal dining experience, they might head to dinner at Merrill House, with its *Wine Spectator*–awarded cellar.

Ian Nelmes moved back to PEC from France with his husband in 2022 to build Mirazule, a four-room modernist inn. "We love [PEC] because it's an island of passionate dreamers who left their jobs to come here and open wineries, boutiques, hotels, breweries," he says.

Where to stay
Don't miss the 33-room, Scandi-looking Royal Hotel in downtown Picton. It has a spa and seasonal outdoor pool, plus a restaurant that features food from its very own Edwin County Farms.

MICHAEL GEORGE

WHERE TO GO IN 2025

Benin

The West African nation is set to become a cultural capital thanks to a slew of new museums.

by Kathleen Rellihan

BENIN IS A tiny African country with a big history. About the size of Ohio with a population of 14 million, it's the birthplace of Vodun, the land of the all-female Agojie warriors who inspired the Viola Davis film *The Woman King*, and one of the most significant sites for the transatlantic slave trade. And now the coastal nation is doubling down on sharing its culture and storied past with visitors.

In the next few years, a handful of new museums will open across the country, formerly known as Dahomey. The Royal Palaces of Abomey, a UNESCO World Heritage site in what was once the Kingdom of Dahomey's capital, are being restored for late 2025 with a museum that will house the 26 royal treasures—including ceremonial thrones and statues—that were returned to Benin by France in 2021. A slavery museum will open in 2025 in the city of Ouidah. Also in the works: a Vodun museum in the capital, Porto-Novo, and a contemporary art gallery in the port city of Cotonou, which debuted a 98-foot-tall bronze monument of an Agojie warrior in 2022; not far from the statue is Africa's longest graffiti wall, currently over a half-mile long and growing.

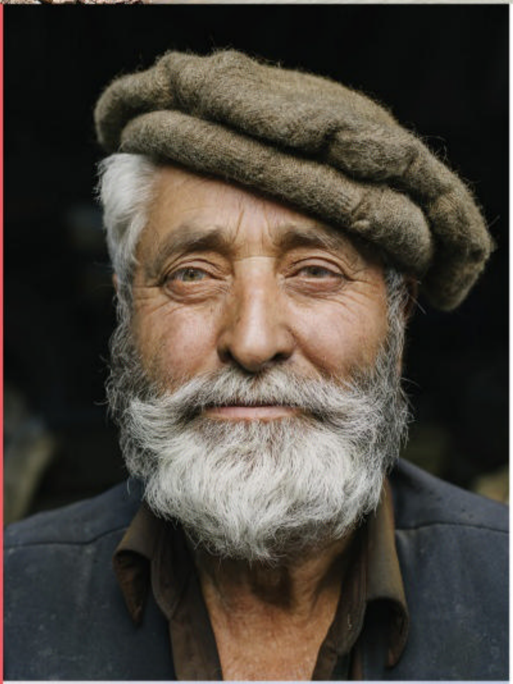
Of course, to really appreciate Benin, visitors should look beyond museums. On a trip this past July with Wademba Travel, I took a boat tour of Ganvie, a floating village built on stilts that's called "the Venice of Africa" and that was a safe haven during the slave trade. In Grand Popo I witnessed a Vodun performance featuring Zangbeto, guardians of the night. Brightly colored haystacks whirled to the beat of drums and chased after onlookers, with no human beings visible under the costumes. The effect was mesmerizing, magical really—much like Benin itself.

Keep in mind
The spelling Vodun (or Vodoun) distinguishes the West African religion from Haitian Vodou. It's considered derogatory to spell it the Western way, Voodoo, outside of Louisiana.

Make it happen
Wademba Travel offers culturally focused tours through southern Benin with young entrepreneurs, village chiefs, Vodun scholars, and more. They can also arrange private trips, including heritage tours.

Where to stay
La Maison de Canelya, a female-owned boutique hotel in Cotonou, has a lovely garden restaurant and bar where local musicians play.

OMRI ELIYAHU, CORA UNK PHOTO, DAVE PRIMOV (SHUTTERSTOCK); JASMIN SHAH (6)



WHERE TO GO IN 2025

Karakoram Mountains, Pakistan

New tours are giving international travelers an immersive way into the culture and adventures of "Little Tibet." by Sarah Reid

THE KARAKORAM MOUNTAINS contain an outsize number of natural wonders: five of the world's 14 peaks above 26,000 feet, more than 7,000 glaciers, and one of the highest and most scenic roads on earth, the Karakoram Highway. Yet, this part of northern Pakistan, also known as Gilgit-Baltistan or "Little Tibet," drew only 11,000 visitors in 2023, or 7 percent of the international travelers who flock to the Himalayan towns and trails of nearby Nepal each year.

And now, responsible-tourism company Intrepid has launched three tours—one for women only, which includes meetings with female leaders and visits to spaces where men are not allowed—that are all led by local guides, in an effort to share more of this region punctuated by soaring summits, turquoise rivers, and alpine valleys.

During my visit in June 2024, we paired hiking with experiences in cities and mountain villages. Activities included observing basket weaving in the remote village of Yugo (which is newly welcoming visitors as climate change increasingly threatens the viability of farming) and learning about the art of ornately painted trucks in bustling Islamabad. There was plenty of time for impromptu cultural exchange along the way: on a multiday trek we spent an afternoon playing cricket with our guide and porters on an alpine meadow surrounded by mountains, followed by an evening of watching the staff demonstrate traditional Pakistani dances around a roaring campfire.

Make it happen
In addition to tours offered by Intrepid, travelers can visit the mountain range with companies including World Expeditions and Rocky Road Travel.

What to know
Between ongoing travel advisories and limited tourism services, Pakistan sees few international visitors. That's changing: Its first-ever national tourism brand, Salam Pakistan, launched in 2023, and in July 2024 it waived tourist visa fees for 126 countries.

KEVIN FAINGNAERT

VOLGA

AN OASIS OF ELEGANCE AND SOPHISTICATION

In the heart of the historic Cuauhtémoc neighborhood of Mexico City, just steps from the iconic tree-lined Paseo de la Reforma, lies Hotel Volga, an oasis of elegance and sophistication. With 50 suites designed to provide a refuge of tranquility and comfort, the boutique hotel recognized with a MICHELIN Key is the perfect destination for those seeking to escape the ordinary and immerse themselves in the city's essence. Designed by the acclaimed Javier Sanchez Architects design firm, Volga is a masterpiece of contemporary architecture, combining natural light and minimalist elegance to create a relaxing and welcoming atmosphere. From its stunning rooftop with panoramic views of the city, to its indoor open-air atrium designed to resemble an urban cenote, Hotel Volga invites guests to immerse in, and discover beauty throughout, the structure's intricate detail.

Hotel Volga also features the dining concept Elora restaurant, local fusion cuisine. Guests can find a well-equipped workstation, a mezcalería with immersive tasting experiences, a charming boutique (Tier2/5) with local goods, and a state-of-the-art, gym, all tailored to meet the needs of discerning travelers. Hotel Volga is the sophisticated gateway to the energy, art, and style of this Mexican metropolis.

Río Volga 105, Cuauhtémoc, Mexico City, Mexico 06500
hotelvolga.mx | @volga_mx

North Wales

Traverse moorlands and mountains and visit ancient churches and historic cafés on a 1,500-year-old pilgrimage. by Phoebe Smith

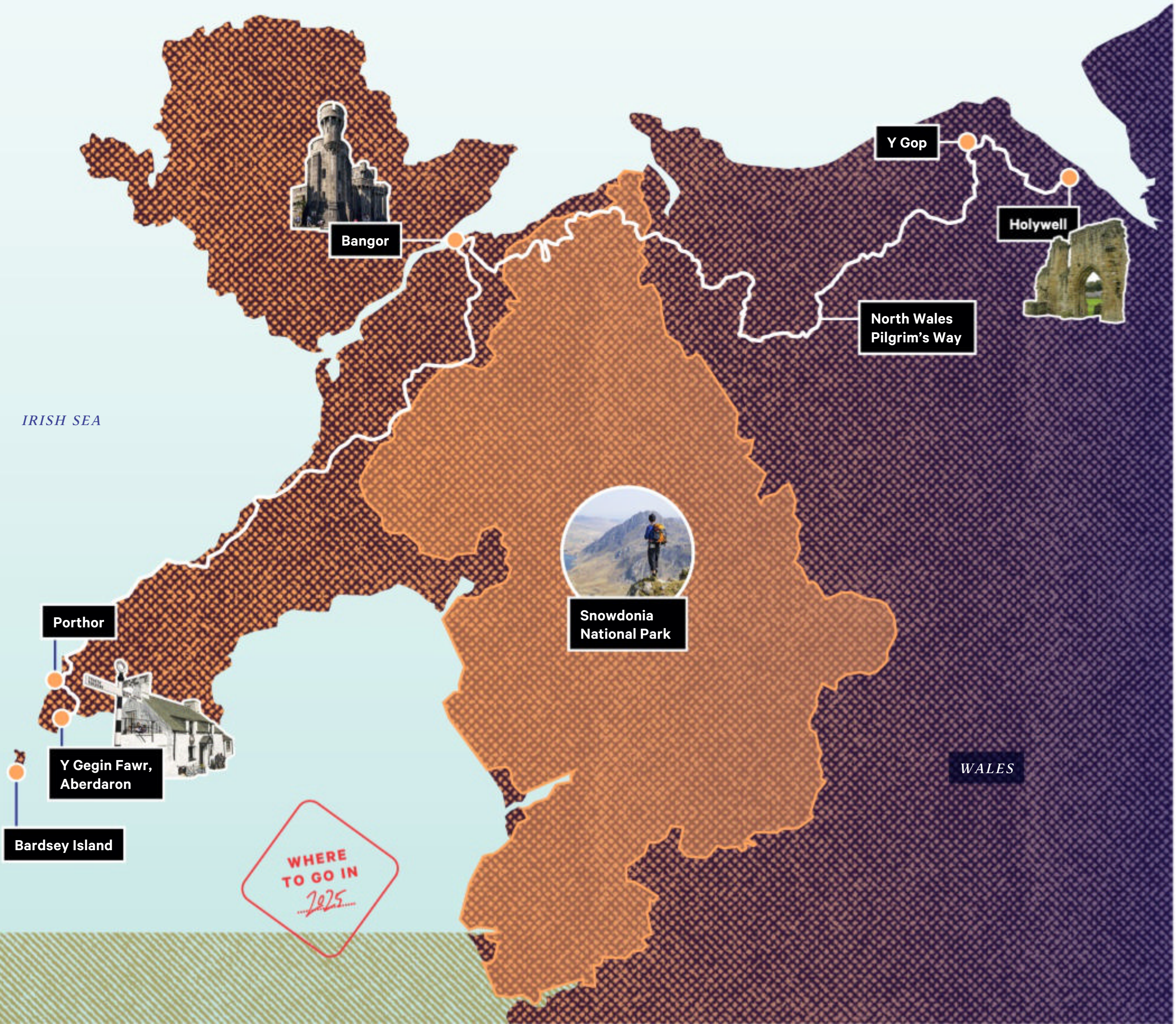
THERE IS A walking route in Europe believed to have been traveled by pilgrims since the 6th century. No, it's not the Camino de Santiago—which, incidentally, was established around 300 years later. This 135-mile trail is found in North Wales, and it cleaves its way through the foothills of Snowdonia's mountains and along the sandy beaches and towering cliffs of the Llŷn Peninsula. It's called the North Wales Pilgrim's Way (in Welsh, Taith Pererin Gogledd Cymru) or, increasingly, the Welsh Camino.

A group of local volunteers began reestablishing the walk in 2011 after it had been forgotten for nearly 500 years. While it was originally a religious undertaking for Christians, its modern iteration is a BYOB (bring your own beliefs) pilgrimage. "I'd walked Spain's Camino and knew we had an ancient route here too," says Chris Potter, one of the (re)creators who researched and linked together a series of old footpaths and bridleways with abbeys, churches, and sacred places.

The route begins at the 12th-century Basingwerk Abbey near Holywell. (From the U.S., it's easist to fly to Manchester, then take a car 47 miles to Holywell.) Highlights include Y Gop, a man-made Stone Age hill where remains of hyenas and bison have been unearthed; the Whistling Sands at Porthor, which squeak beneath the weight of each footstep; and Y Gegin Fawr, a café founded in the 13th century in Aberdaron that serves fish cakes and crab sandwiches. While Aberdaron is the end of the walking route, from there most travelers take a 20-minute boat ride to Bardsey Island, just as pilgrims did hundreds of years ago.

Make it happen
Trail expert Chris Potter advises completing the Welsh Camino over two weeks, averaging around 10 miles a day (the difficulty level is moderate) and staying in B&Bs, hotels, or campsites en route. (Some walk smaller portions.) Edge of Wales Walk offers packages, as well as luggage transfers and rentable GPS devices.

The more you know
Pilgrimages were popular in Great Britain in medieval times, but King Henry VIII banned them in 1538 after his split with the Catholic Church. The British Pilgrimage Trust was founded in 2014 to renew the tradition and offer access to more than 250 routes across Britain.



NADYA ABBISS, KATH WATSON (SHUTTERSTOCK); ARCHIVE PL, TRAVELIB WALES (ALAMY)

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WHERE TO GO IN 2025

Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany

While its cobbled streets and turreted buildings look straight out of a fairy tale, the southwest German city offers a template for sustainable living. by Carole Braden

Bächle *water channels run along many of Freiburg im Breisgau's cobblestone streets.*

SITUATED IN THE Black Forest near the French and Swiss borders, Freiburg im Breisgau is a medieval university city of 235,000—and one of the world's greenest urban centers. Nicknamed Europe's "solar city," it's been so successful in expanding its solar and wind energy use that it vows to achieve climate neutrality by 2035 (stepped up from 2050).

With a storybook old town of car-free streets, colorful half-timbered houses, and Gothic churches, Freiburg is best explored on two wheels. More than 300 miles of bike paths mean zero-emissions cycling is the most practical way to get around; ubiquitous Frelo bikeshare stations make hopping on easy.

Travelers should ride south of the city center to Vauban, a planned community focused on sustainability. To the east of the mini-suburb is the Heliotrope, a rotating, cylindrical home designed by architect Rolf Disch. Completed in 1994, it was the world's first energy-plus dwelling (meaning it harnesses more energy than it uses). "This was an experimental house," says Hanna Lehmann, Disch's wife and a retired educator who hosts tours of the couple's 30-year residence. You can also visit Disch's Solar Settlement of 59 energy-plus residential buildings in Vauban, and then treat yourself to a vegan chocolate-hazelnut scoop at Eiscafé Limette.

In March 2025, the opening of the Dokumentationszentrum Nationalsozialismus (DZNS) Museum Freiburg will shine a light on the city's darker history, offering a hard look at the mindset that let National Socialists, and then Nazis, take power here in 1933. The museum's frank exhibits will illustrate, perhaps more than anything, Freiburg's commitment to moving forward.

Make it happen
Local guide Annemarie Schaaf leads customized sustainability walks. Contact her via *annemarie-schaaf.de*.

Where to stay
The new Hotel am Rathaus is a cobblestone's throw from the towering Freiburg Cathedral and the city's tourism office.

Only in Freiburg
Bächle, burbling streetside channels, rush cold water from the mountains to cool off weary walkers' feet.

PHILIPP SEILER (ALAMY)

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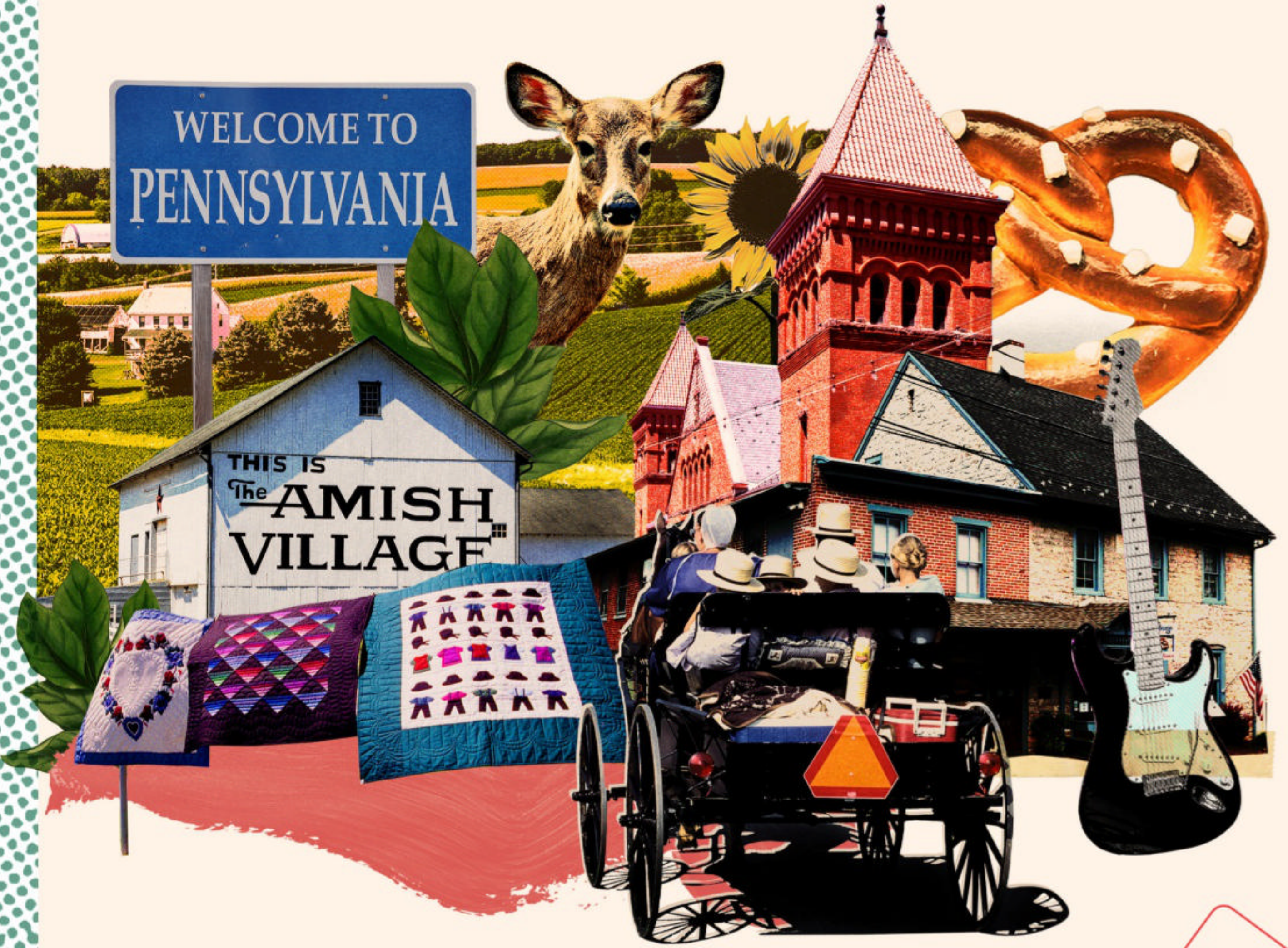

WHERE TO GO IN 2025

Lititz, Pennsylvania

Amish culture and rock and roll converge 75 miles west of Philadelphia. by Sally Kohn

LANCASTER COUNTY, Pennsylvania, is best known for being home to America's oldest Amish settlement and oldest continuously operated farmers' market. People come for rustic farm stays, buggy rides, quilt shopping—and, as it happens, to rock out. Lititz, less than 30 minutes from the city of Lancaster, is the de facto mission control of live music in the country; it has the largest concert tour production facility in the United States. For the past 10 years, everyone from BTS and Beyoncé to U2 and Green Day has descended upon this borough (population: 9,800) to perfect their epic stage shows at Rock Lititz's 70,000 square feet of studio space before setting out on tour. And, yes, sometimes you can find rock stars wandering around downtown.

Chance celebrity sightings aren't the sweetest part of visiting Lititz, though. That would be Wilbur Chocolate, home of the famous "Wilbur Buds"—a treat similar to Hershey's Kisses and even older, dating back to 1894. After a tour of the town's Julius Sturgis Pretzel Bakery (the nation's first, founded in 1861), you'll want to go see more of Lancaster County.

Village Greens in Strasburg may be the country's most enchanting miniature golf course, spread over 13 acres of woods and manicured gardens. For an authentic Amish experience, visit Amish Village in Ronks and tour a farmhouse, blacksmith shop, and one-room schoolhouse from the 1800s. Those not wishing to commit to radical simplicity just yet should set aside plenty of time to shop in the city of Lancaster, which has been dubbed "little Brooklyn" on account of its booming restaurant scene and vintage stores. The best places to go? Space, for mid-century modern furniture, and Building Character, an antiques and crafts emporium with more than 70 vendors selling everything from clothes and jewelry to art and—fittingly—records.

Where to stay
Sweet dreams are ensured at the Wilbur Lititz, Tapestry Collection by Hilton, located in an old Wilbur chocolate factory and featuring preserved brickwork in the spacious rooms.

Required eating
Luca, in Lancaster, is one of the best farm-driven Italian restaurants east of the Mississippi, and it's worth timing your trip to feast on its famous Sunday meatballs. Also be sure to try the Spaetzle di Elsa, which mixes the restaurant's Italian focus with Lancaster County's German heritage.

KATHERINE WELLES, AMY LUTZ, JON BILOUS, GEORGE SHELDON (SHUTTERSTOCK); MICHAEL VENTURA, ALPHA STOCK, GARRY BLACK (ALAMY); CAROLINE GUTMAN (2); BRANDI ALEXANDRA (UNSPLASH)

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WHERE TO GO IN 2025

Wild Coast, South Africa

A rugged 150-mile stretch along the Eastern Cape province delivers epic marine adventures. by Pier Nirandara

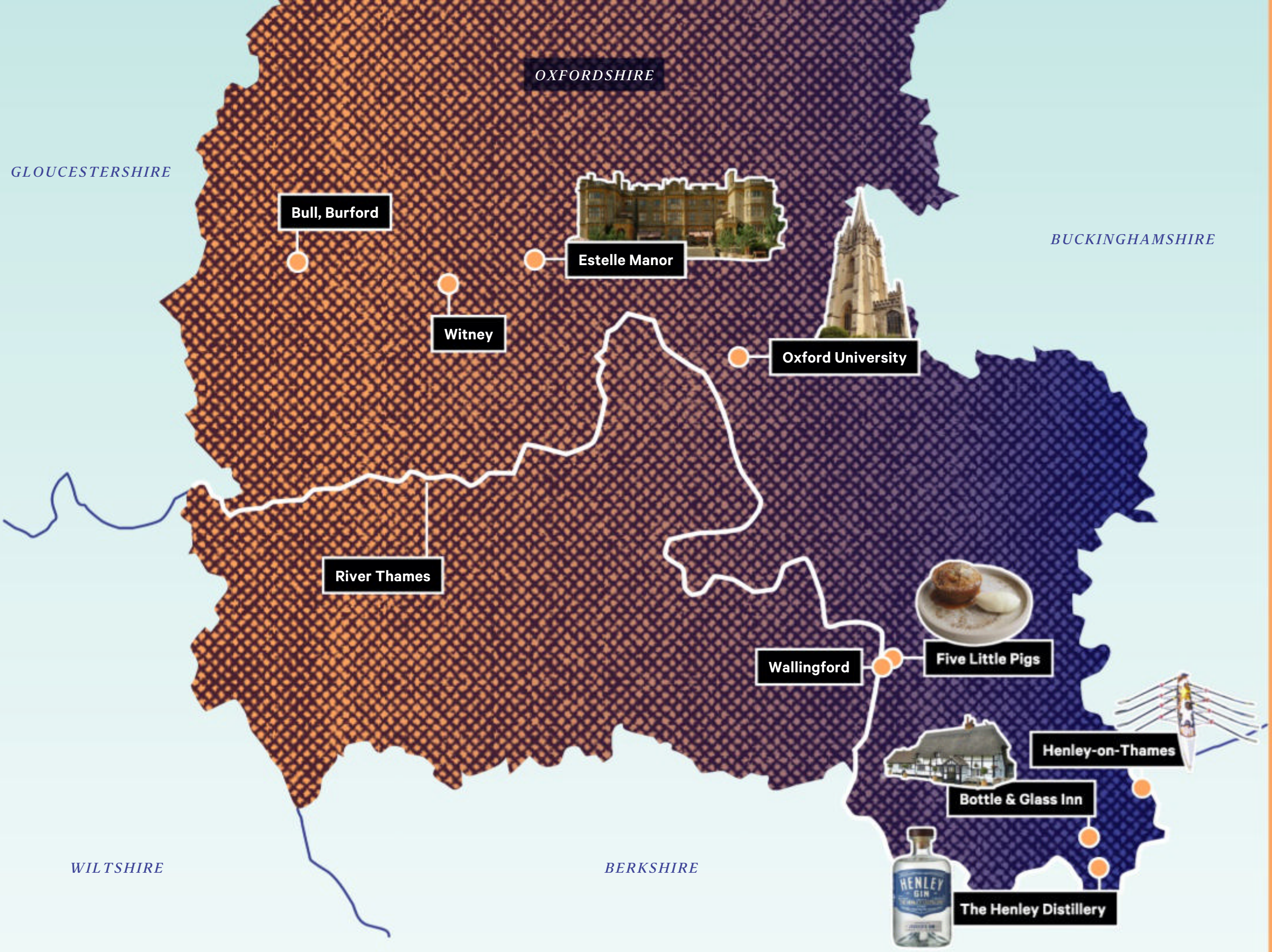
WHILE MOST INTERNATIONAL visitors to South Africa go on a safari and maybe visit Cape Town or Johannesburg, relatively few make it to the country's untamed southeastern shore, an area whose name couldn't be more accurate: the Wild Coast. Here, golden hills are marked with cylindrical huts called rondavels, rivers spill into sweeping bays, and beaches are scattered with roaming Nguni cows and remnants of shipwrecks. Once known as the Transkei, an area where many Black South Africans were forcibly relocated during apartheid, the Wild Coast has a complex past and a compelling present.

Getting there is an adventure. The easiest option is to hop a domestic flight to the lively town of Mthatha, rent a car, and venture down dirt roads to beachfront destinations like Chintsa and Port St. Johns. The biggest draw is the area's annual sardine run—a natural migration of billions of fish up the coast each June and July, attracting impressive aquatic predators including dusky sharks and Bryde's whales. Operators such as Offshore Africa and Animal Ocean lead diving trips to witness this *Blue Planet*–esque action firsthand.

"The Wild Coast is a breathtaking coastline," says Monwabisi Ngcai, the head of the Wild Coast Museum in Port St. Johns, which showcases exhibits on the region's culture and history, from its early inhabitants to the arrival of the British and apartheid. Back in Mthatha, the Nelson Mandela Museum pays homage to the area's native son, the freedom fighter who became the country's first democratically elected president. Learning more about Mandela and what this region's people have endured will deepen your appreciation for the Wild Coast.

Where to stay
The upscale Umngazi Hotel, located on the coast near Port St. Johns, has a tranquil spa and thatched-roof rooms. At Bulungula Eco-Lodge, which is fully owned and managed by Nqileni village, a Xhosa community, guests can stay in a traditional rondavel. Local residents provide Xhosa culture tours, drumming lessons, and more.

PIER NIRANDARA (2); IAN DAGNALL (ALAMY); COURTESY OF BULUNGULA ECO-LODGE



COURTESY OF ESTELLE MANOR; FIVE LITTLE PIGS; BOTTLE & GLASS INN; THE HENLEY DISTILLERY; MEGAPIXELES.ES, AGMUROZ1 (SHUTTERSTOCK)

Oxfordshire, England

Go beyond the confines of the famous university to find pastoral beauty, fashionable inns, creative dining, and literary icons. by Lottie Gross

THE CITY OF Oxford, England, is beloved for its sandstone buildings, intricate church spires, and illustrious university. But over the past few years, smaller towns throughout the county of Oxfordshire have added a healthy crop of new restaurants, hotels, and inns that infuse this bucolic region with modern twists.

Southeast of Oxford, the well-heeled riverside town of Henley-on-Thames sees 300,000 people descend on its streets for a rowing regatta each July. But outside of the five-day event, few make the journey to wander its flagstone market square or leafy Thames-side footpaths. Those who do can tour the award-winning Henley Distillery or watch the open-fire cooking theatrics in the newly restored Barn restaurant at the Bottle & Glass Inn.

Drive 13 miles west to reach Wallingford, whose greatest claim to fame is being the former hometown of Agatha Christie. Visitors are rewarded with seasonal dishes at Five Little Pigs (the restaurant's name is a reference to one of Christie's novels) that may include a Scotch egg, a dry-aged steak, or a ratatouille pancake.

A further 25 miles northwest, the medieval wool-making town of Witney is now in the spotlight thanks to the opening of ultra-luxury Estelle Manor, which has hosted the likes of Princess Beatrice and actor Rebel Wilson. Another eight-mile drive brings you to the town of Burford, which is reviving its main street with Bull, an 18-room inn with Damien Hirst and Liu Bolin artwork on the walls, plus Banksy's Met Ball installation hanging in the front window. Each of these towns is a testament to the creativity of Oxfordshire's residents, while showcasing the beauty of an area that deserves far more attention than it gets.

Make it happen
Private custom day tours with Victoria Proffitt-White's Cotswolds Teacup Tours provide a local's insight into Oxfordshire's towns and villages, as well as the small businesses that make the county so intriguing.

Required reading
Delve into the dramatic fictional world created by Agatha Christie. Her hometown of Wallingford is believed to have inspired her short story *The Market Basing Mystery* and novel *Dumb Witness*.

Sumba, Indonesia

The tropical island promises cultural immersion and untamed natural beauty without the crowds of neighboring Bali.

by Kathryn Romeyn

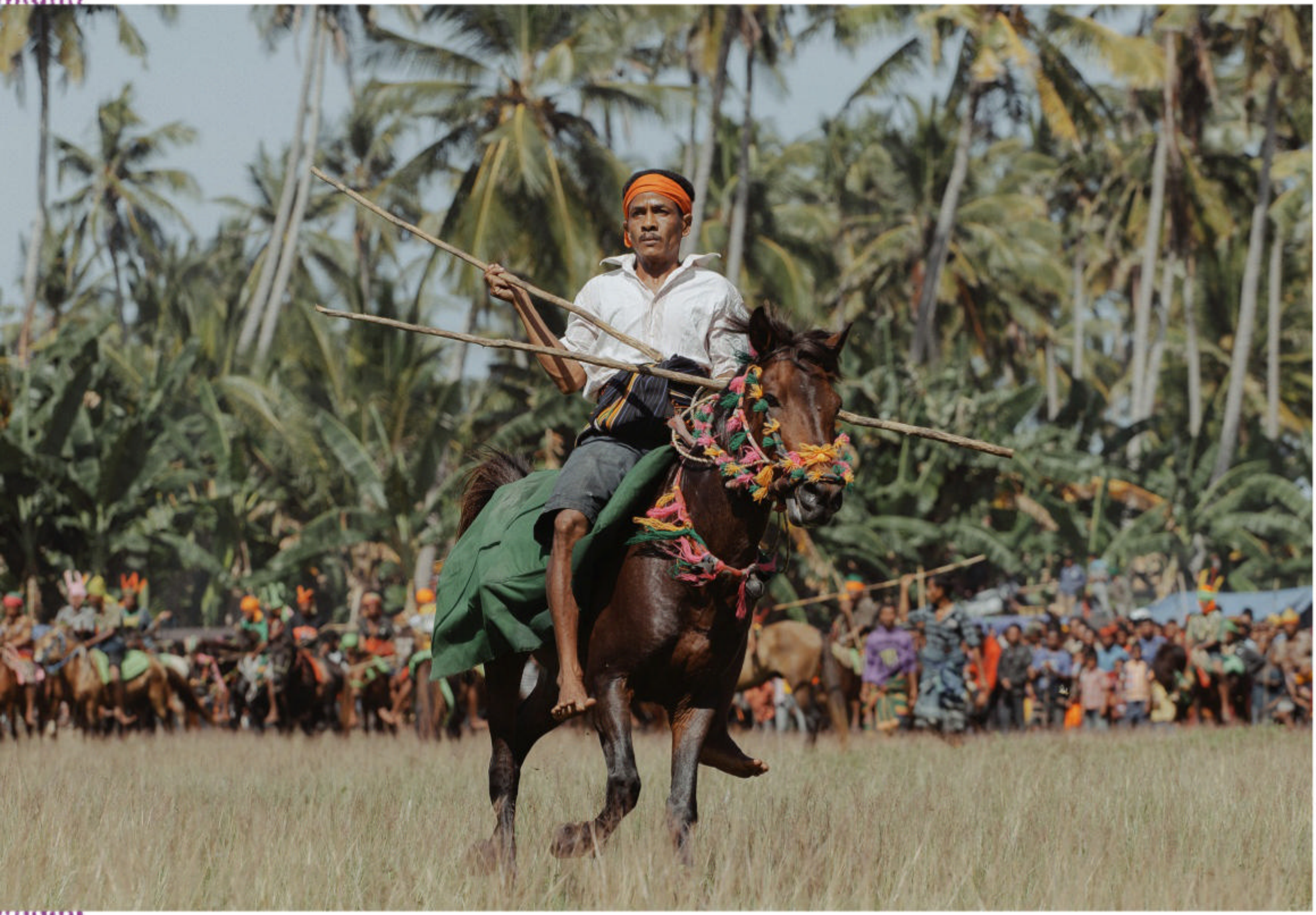
SUMBA HAS MANY of the same natural draws as the Indonesian hot spot Bali, which is just an hour flight away—white-sand beaches, hidden waterfalls—but with a fraction of the tourists. In a given month, Bali has more than 500,000 visitors; in an entire year, Sumba has 25,000. It also has a culture all its own. Here, many Sumbese draw beliefs and rituals from an ancient form of ancestor worship called Marapu. The best time to visit is February or March to witness one of the island's best-preserved Marapu events: *pasola*, a jousting-like competition in which opposing groups ride sandalwood ponies (a breed of small horse unique to Indonesia) and hurl wooden spears at each other. Traditionally, spilled blood translated to a healthy harvest; now, the spears are blunted, but the competition is still fierce. (The exact dates are determined by the appearance of *nyale* sea worms.)

In the past couple of years, intrepid hoteliers have introduced new ecofriendly resorts—namely Cap Karoso, a hotel with 44 rooms and 20 villas operating on 50 percent solar energy that opened on the west coast in 2023; and the Sanubari, a 247-acre property with a farm and 11 villas (more are under construction) that opened in the southwest in 2022. Both promise quiet luxury and activities like village tours and horseback riding. A few days on Sumba may involve surfing superlative waves, hiking to crystal-clear lagoons, and spotting starfish from a stand-up paddleboard.

Despite the recent growth, the island retains under-the-radar allure. "Sumba seems to be developing in a slower and more sustainable way than so many other places in the world," says Rowan Burn, co-owner of the Sanubari. "It feels like a safe haven and retreat from the modern world."

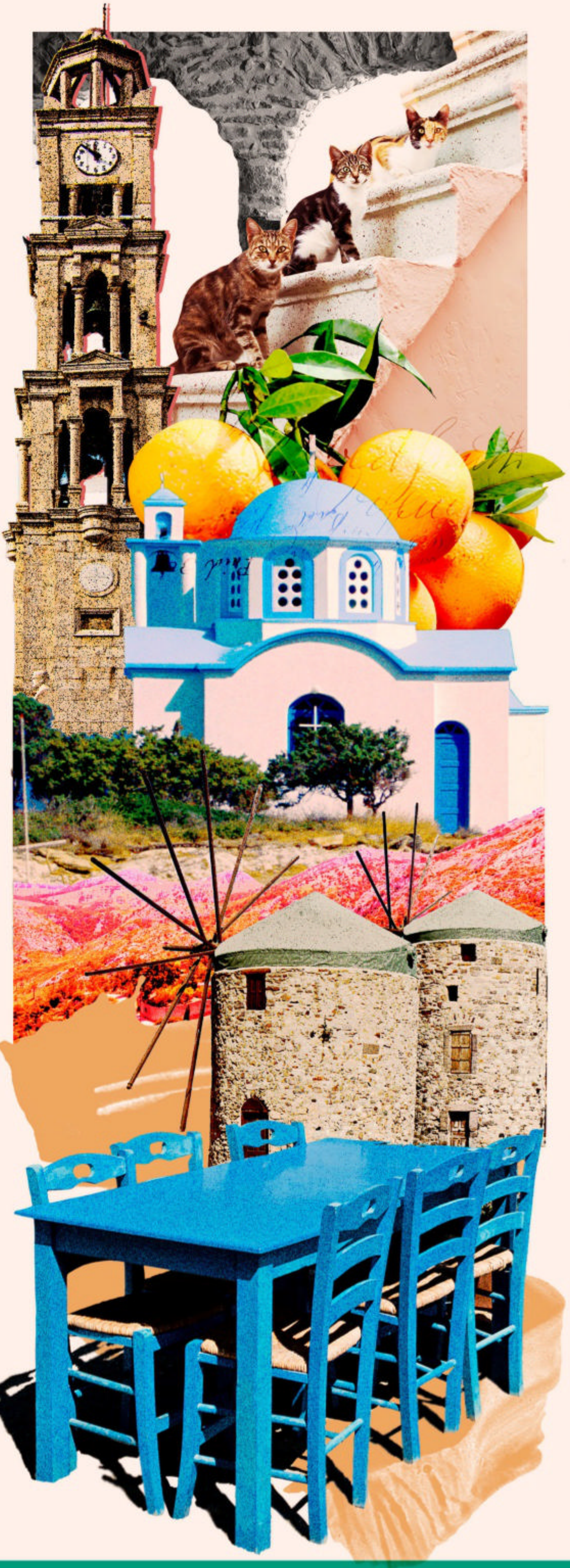
Only in Sumba

Villages in Sumba look like no others, thanks to the unique architectural style of the homes, called *uma mbatangu*. The three-level structures have soaring, sorcerer hat–like roofs that are considered a sacred space for spirits to reside. (Some families also use this space for food storage.) Per Marapu tradition, to keep ancestors close, the homes are situated near tombs.



MUHAMMAD FADLI

A pasola *fighter prepares for battle in Rara Winyo, a village in southwest Sumba.*



KADAGAN, KATHO MENDEN, VALEKSTUDIO, ESIN DENIZ, IREMT (SHUTTERSTOCK); CARLO RACITI; ROBERTHARDING (ALAMY)

Chios, Greece

Best known for its prized mastic trees and lush citrus orchards, this Greek island is in the midst of a cultural revitalization. by Helen Iatrou

THE FIFTH-LARGEST Greek island, Chios is famous for its miraculous *mastiha*, the aromatic resin from mastic trees that is used in cooking and works wonders for oral health and digestion—something the ancient Greeks have known since the fifth century B.C.E.

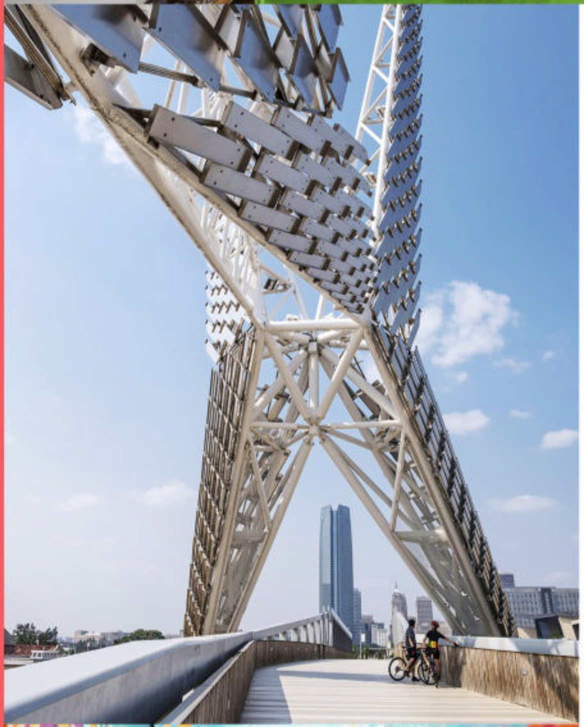
Because of this valuable export and a longstanding maritime tradition, Chios hasn't prioritized tourism as much as other Greek locales have. But that's starting to change. Situated in the low-key northeastern Aegean just 50 minutes from Athens by plane, the island is luring travelers with painstakingly preserved medieval villages, new cultural experiences, and landscapes that vary from pine forests and citrus groves to tamarisk-lined pebble beaches.

Journalist-turned-taverna-owner Nikos Georgoulis is spearheading cultural heritage tourism efforts to revive Pityos, a village of about 40 inhabitants in the north. He has recruited elders and young residents alike to run private walking tours (stops include an old olive mill and a 14th-century tower) and classes. For example, visitors can learn to make a hand-rolled pasta called *herissia* or take a lesson in traditional dance.

On the east coast is the fertile plain of Kampos, where row upon row of citrus orchards hide behind tall walls surrounding grand Genoese estates built with local stone. Some, including Perleas Mansion, have been converted into boutique accommodations; the Perivoli Estate, meanwhile, houses the Citrus Museum, documenting the area's agricultural history. In 2020, Odysseas Xydas opened the café-bar Perivoli on the estate, which has been in his family for generations. Guests can dig into slices of lemon pie and buy jars of mandarin marmalade to take home. "Kampos is a hidden diamond in the rough," Xydas says. "It doesn't proclaim to the world that it once was home to significant wealth, but the visitor immediately understands that history exists behind these high stone walls."

Where to stay
Pearl Island Chios Hotel & Spa opened this past July near Chios town and has 48 luxurious suites, a wellness center, and an Olympic-size pool.

Make it happen
Let Athens-based Grecian Lux make the travel arrangements and put together a personalized itinerary, including an exclusive experience to meet a mastic producer. They can also assist those with ancestral ties to the island in tracing their family roots.



Oklahoma City

With a booming film industry and dining scene, OKC has been transformed in recent years. by Matt Kirouac

LONG STEREOTYPED BY its twisters and cattle country locale, Oklahoma City is an underrated capital on the rise—quite literally, as the proposed Legends Tower would be the tallest building in the United States. If completed, it would rise to 1,907 feet, to match the year that Oklahoma joined the Union.

Record-setting architecture is only a facet of this growing city, a trend spurred by a low cost of living, the rise of remote work, a burgeoning film industry, and an increasingly lauded dining scene. Residents and travelers alike frequent the area's cultural attractions, such as the Oscars-qualifying DeadCenter Film Festival, and recent films shot and set in the Sooner State—including *Twisters* (2024) and *Killers of the Flower Moon* (2023)—have been boons to the local economy. Meanwhile, also in 2023, Andrew Black of tasting-menu restaurant Grey Sweater became the first Oklahoma chef to win a James Beard Award.

"The city has undergone a significant transformation over the past few decades, driven by strategic investments in infrastructure, culture, and community," says Rachael Crawford, executive director of the Plaza District, a neighborhood known for its street art, festivals, and restaurants.

Evidence of such investment is everywhere, from the shimmering high-rises and meandering man-made waterway of the Bricktown Canal to the upscale retail of Nichols Hills and the myriad galleries in the Paseo Arts District. It's a city that literally plays in the big leagues (and getting bigger, with a nearly approved new downtown arena for the OKC Thunder NBA team), yet still manages to feel like a friendly small town where, even in the space of a short getaway, shop owners may greet you by name and baristas know just how you like your latte.

Where to stay
Bradford House is a 36-room boutique abode clad in pink and green that features a wraparound porch. Located in a repurposed Victorian mansion built in 1912, the hotel exudes elegance, from its patisserie and midweek jazz nights to its chic guest rooms.

Required reading
Boom Town by Sam Anderson (Crown, 2018) traces the city's history, from its overnight founding during the 1889 Land Run to the thunderous success of its NBA team.

JESSE EDGAR; CHARLES O CECIL (ALAMY); COURTESY OF DESIGN HOTELS; DAMON EATS

Patagonia Azul

New glampsites and hiking trails have opened up a part of Argentina known mostly to wildlife. by Tim Chester

PATAGONIA'S PERCEPTION in the popular imagination is well defined—jagged mountains, brilliant white glaciers, and teal lakes—but there's a lesser-known part of this region that looks nothing like the guidebook covers.

Patagonia Azul, a slice of Argentina's eastern coast, is a biodiverse wonderland. It's a place where slender guanacos with chestnut-brown fur roam steppes stretching to the Argentine Sea, and colonies of marine birds—including the endemic Chubut steamer duck and Olrog's gull—soar over the kelp-packed waters. Wildlife thrives here, but humans are sparse. Few visitors pass this way, and just over 1,500 people live in Camarones, the area's biggest town.

It's all part of the UNESCO Patagonia Azul Biosphere Reserve, newly under the stewardship of Rewilding Argentina, an offshoot of the Tompkins Conservation organization that has protected huge tracts of land both here and in Chile over several decades. The group combines rewilding efforts with modest tourism infrastructure such as hiking trails and visitor centers to encourage a small number of conscientious travelers to explore the area.

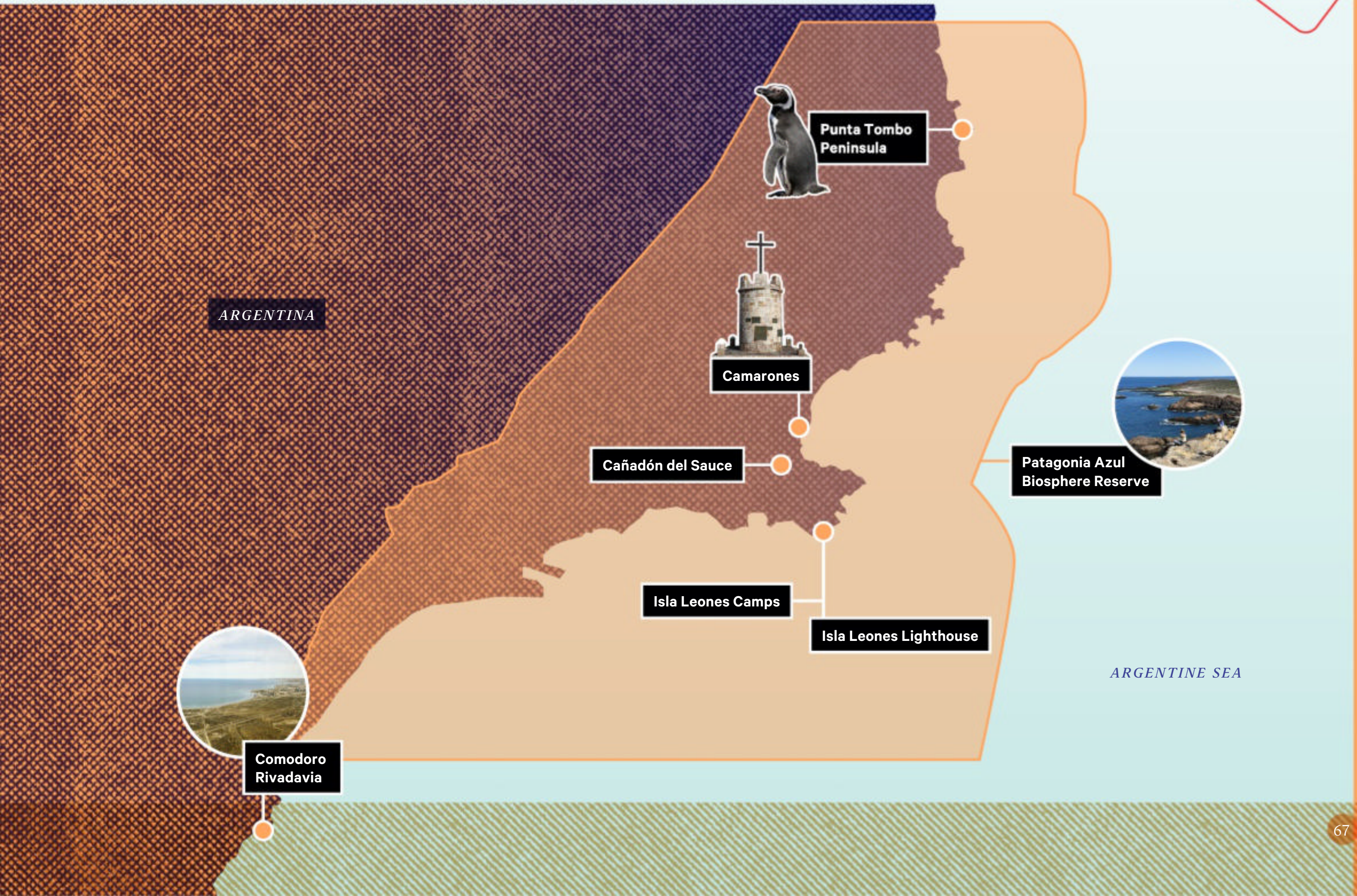
When I came here in late 2023, we drove through plains accented by tufts of grass and striking rock formations, and visited a free campsite—Cañadón del Sauce—where the spots to pitch a tent are marked by hand-drawn signs and named after local vegetation. Then we took to the sea in an inflatable dinghy, the only boat we saw the whole trip; we bobbed among sea lions, cormorants, and giant petrels riding the air inches above the water to an abandoned 100-year-old, 11-sided lighthouse. We also walked along boardwalks among the world's largest Magellanic penguin colony on the Punta Tombo peninsula. Thousands of them brayed and waddled in peace, far outnumbering their adoring audience of a few dozen humans—a ratio that will likely, thankfully, never change.

ALEX BRAMWELL, CHRISSTOCKPHOTOGRAPHY (ALAMY); TIM CHESTER (2)

Where to stay
Isla Leones Camps offers six comfortable cabins. All the freshly prepared meals and activities, including cycling and boat trips, are included. The cabins can be booked through Rewilding Experience.

Make it happen
Fly just over two hours from Buenos Aires to Comodoro Rivadavia and pick up a rental car to travel around the area. Tour operator Journeys With Purpose can arrange a personalized trip to the region to meet conservation leaders and see their work firsthand.

WHERE TO GO IN 2025



Boone, North Carolina

Come for the scenic trails; stay for the Gilded Age history, flourishing creative arts scene, and river snorkeling. by Susan Portnoy

WHERE TO GO IN 2025

Editor's note: In September 2024, Hurricane Helene caused some damage in Boone. Most of the area has recovered, but we recommend checking exploreboone.com *for any travel updates before your visit.*

CRADLED WITHIN North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains, Boone emerged from geographical isolation with the arrival of the Tweetsie Railroad in 1919. Wealthy industrialists, such as Gilded Age denim magnate Moses H. Cone, built summer estates in the area, turning the sleepy village into a coveted destination.

Today, Boone's appeal endures as a gateway to outdoor adventure, about two hours north of the larger city of Asheville. From a base in the spirited mountain town, you can hike the trails of 5,946-foot Grandfather Mountain; take in scenic segments of the Blue Ridge Parkway by car; and go tubing, kayaking, and fishing in the New River. Additionally, in 2025 seven new public sites are opening along Boone's leg of the Blue Ridge Snorkel Trail, where diverse freshwater fish species and the hellbender (a two-foot salamander) await those curious to try river snorkeling.

Appalachian State University is also based in Boone, fueling a dynamic Americana music and creative arts scene. But while fresh-faced students pump Boone with extra energy during the school year, the strong community spirit of the 20,000 permanent residents can be felt all year long through First Friday art crawls, monthly vendor markets, and a downtown with independently owned and operated businesses.

On the main boulevard of King Street, the store Ellison sells handmade ceramics and custom leather goods. Steps away, the Hands Gallery showcases jewelry, clay work, and paintings by area artists. Food-wise, Wild Craft Eatery sources fish, meat, and poultry locally, and serves an addictive caramel apple pie.

A journey to the "Heart of the High Country" could, however, trigger an incurable case of what residents refer to as the Boonerang Effect: Visit once, and you'll return again and again.

Make it happen
Kelly McCoy, owner of RiverGirl Fishing Company, offers seasonal guided fly-fishing and other water sports along the South Fork of the New River. Ⓐ

Boone's section of the Blue Ridge Mountains is filled with year-round adventures.

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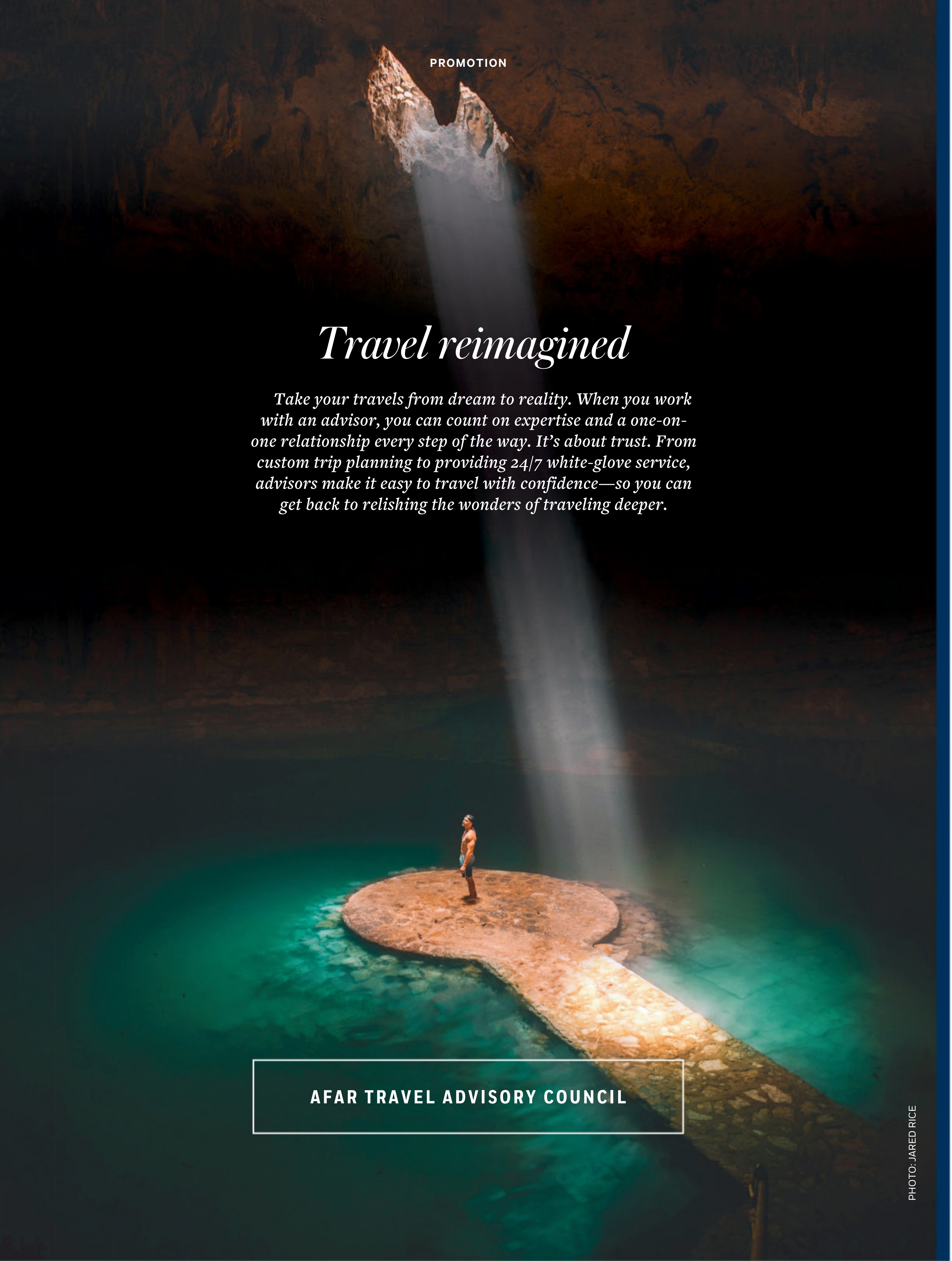

Travel reimagined

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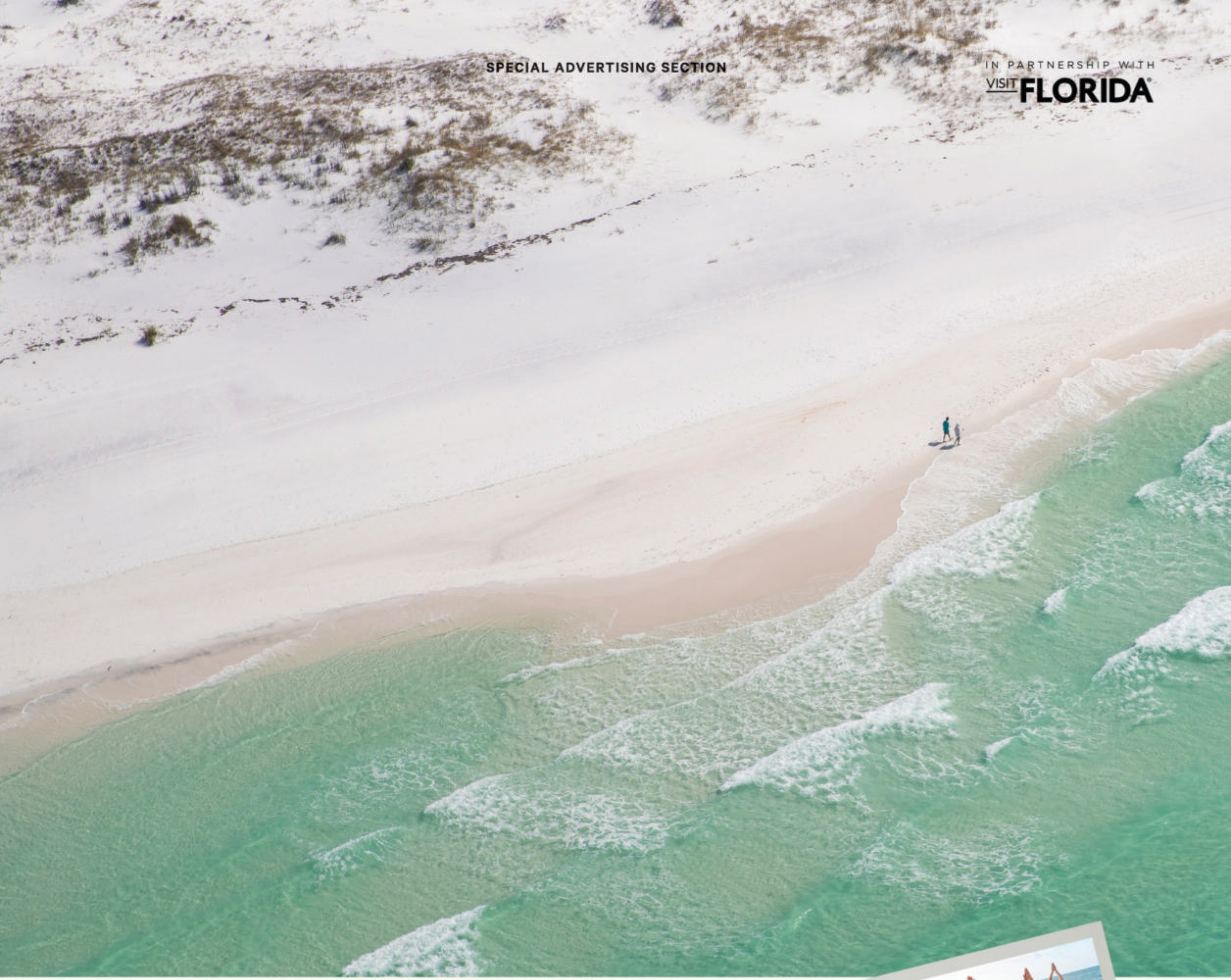
AFAR TRAVEL ADVISORY COUNCIL

PHOTO: JARED RICE

Isn’t It Time for a Classic Beach Destination?

With soft sands, islands to explore, miles of nature trails, plus renowned shopping, dining, and culture, the Sunshine State has a distinctive charm that’s been attracting beachgoers for decades. Here’s where to enjoy the perennial appeal of Florida today.



Welcome to Your Dream Beach Vacation

Revel in the hundreds of miles of nature trails, unique neighborhoods, fishing, and rare coastal dune lakes of South Walton.

Tucked into one of the Northwest Florida Panhandle's curves, where turquoise Gulf waters ebb and flow along 26 miles of sugary white-sand beaches, South Walton boasts unmatched natural beauty. Vast nature preserves complement over a dozen neighborhoods, each with its own personality and style.

Hike or bike through more than 200 miles of trails and check out some of **Point Washington State Forest's** 15,000 acres, spotting ospreys, red-headed woodpeckers, laughing gulls, and other birds. Spend an afternoon fishing for redfish or king mackerel on a charter boat in the Gulf of Mexico, or drop your line shoreside at **Choctawhatchee Bay**, where salt and fresh water mix. For an active yet laid-back adventure, rent a kayak or stand-up paddleboard and

glide across one of the area's 15 coastal dune lakes, a phenomenon found in few other places in the world.

Enjoy South Walton's casual vibe as you browse eclectic small shops, local art galleries, and boutiques. With 200-plus dining options, including several led by award-winning chefs, the restaurant scene will impress even the most discriminating gourmands.

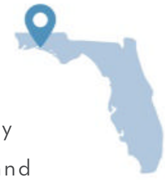
Easily accessible from nearly any part of the United States and with abundant luxury accommodation options, South Walton has an easygoing ambience and plentiful amenities, making it ideal for a weekend getaway or an extended stay.

Start dreaming at VisitSouthWalton.com

Find Your Ideal Neighborhood

With four championship courses, **Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort** in **Miramar Beach** is a golfer's haven. Discover **Dune Allen's** dunes, coastal lakes, and natural habitats at **Topsail Hill Preserve State Park**, one of four state parks in South Walton. Taste "Fish Whistle" and other Florida-inspired IPAs at the two craft breweries in historic **Santa Rosa Beach**, and sample coastal cuisine in **Seaside**, the birthplace of the new urban design movement and location of the movie *The Truman Show*. These are just a few of the 16 distinctive neighborhoods in South Walton that make it easy to discover your perfect beach.

YOUR GETAWAY. YOUR HOMECOMING.



South Walton's turquoise water, 26 miles of sugar-white sand, and 16 beach neighborhoods in Northwest Florida effortlessly blend natural beauty, modern amenities, world class cuisine, and small town charm that draw people together year after year.

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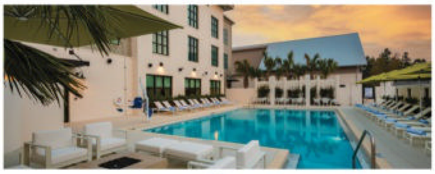

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Dig your toes into sugary white sand or take a dip in warm Gulf of Mexico waters to see why the beaches of St. Pete-Clearwater are often voted among America's best. But there's a creative side to discover here, too.

Light, sound, and images surround you in the immersive *Dalí Alive 360* experience at the **Salvador Dalí Museum**. Catch a concert at the **BayCare Sound**, downtown Clearwater's 4,000-seat, eco-friendly concert hall along the waterfront.

Massive public art installations complement the relaxed outdoor atmosphere of the newly opened **St. Pete Pier**. You can also shop the local arts and crafts marketplace; dine at seaside bistros, cafés, and bars; and go on an eco-boat trip around Tampa Bay. Sip ales, lagers, and other brews at upwards of 35 locally owned breweries along the **Gulp Coast Craft Beer Trail**. Cheers!

Check it out at VisitSPC.com

The Art of Glass

Learn about the history of the American Studio Glass Movement and see nearly 500 works of contemporary glass art from worldwide artists at the **Imagine Museum**, which is dedicated to raising the genre's profile. Admire the colorful, abstract sea creatures made of glass at the **Chihuly Collection** presented by the **Morean Arts Center**, a permanent exhibition of more than a dozen Dale Chihuly installations in downtown St. Pete.

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Rent a kayak and paddle along the **Great Calusa Blueway**, a 180-mile trail that weaves around **Pine Island Sound** to **Estero Bay**, then up through the **Caloosahatchee River's** tributaries. Let someone else take the helm on a dolphin cruise. Visitors of all ages love counting bald eagles at **J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge**, home to over 245 migratory bird species.

You can also discover Fort Myers's rich small-town atmosphere. Neighborhoods vary from charming, no-stoplight **Sanibel Island**, with the **Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum & Aquarium**, to secluded **Captiva Island**, best known for superb beachcombing. On the mainland, buy a watercolor by a local artist at the monthly **Art and Music Walk**, and immerse yourself in history at the **Edison and Ford Winter Estates**, the former homes of Thomas Edison and Henry Ford.

Get more inspiration at VisitFortMyers.com

Natural Splendor Awaits in Fort Myers

Dive deeper into Fort Myers's impressive natural resources. Walk the easy, one-mile boardwalk through **Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve**, a 3,400-acre wetland ecosystem where northern river otters and more live among thick cypress swamps. Catch one of the twice-daily shows at the **Calusa Nature Center & Planetarium** to see terrestrial and celestial worlds on display.

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Step into Gilded Age history at the **Henry Morrison Flagler Museum**, the industrialist's former Palm Beach mansion. Visit the **Kravis Center for the Performing Arts** in West Palm Beach to take in a concert or touring Broadway show. For sports fans, springtime means **spring training games** across The Palm Beaches. The region also offers miles and miles of scenic landscapes to explore, from postcard-worthy surf and sand to gorgeous hiking trails and vibrant gardens.

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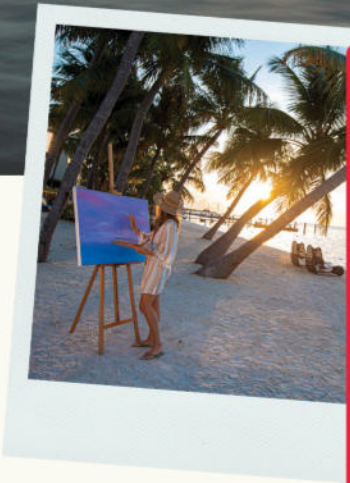
Spend time outdoors on a day trip to **Bahia Honda State Park** and **Dry Tortugas National Park**, home to **Fort Jefferson**. Enjoy live music at venues as big as the **Key West Amphitheater** or as small as local dive bars.

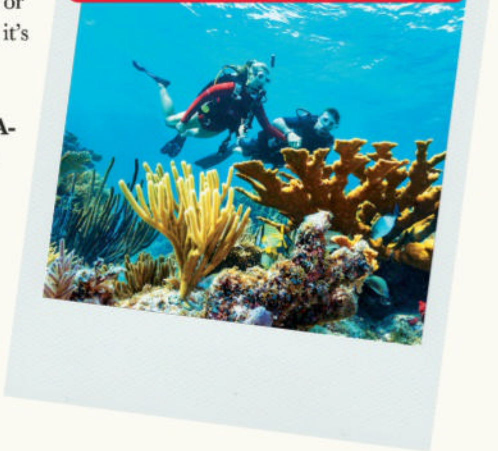
Whether you come by air, land, or sea, getting here is a breeze. But it's awfully hard to leave.

To learn more, call 1-800-FLA-KEYS or visit Fla-Keys.com



Unparalleled Diving in the Florida Keys

Discover incredible snorkeling and scuba diving throughout the Florida Keys & Key West in the **Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary**. Roughly five miles off the Florida shore, it includes the only living coral barrier reef in the continental U.S., a habitat filled with 6,000 species of marine life. Snorkelers can explore shallow reefs teeming with fish, while divers can venture further underwater to coral-encrusted shipwrecks.



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Among the 47 miles of soft sand lapped by the ocean, dozens of renowned arts and cultural organizations delight travelers. Take in theatrical performances at **Palm Beach Dramaworks** and visit the **Maltz Jupiter Theatre** for spectacular concerts. Celebrate the **Boca Raton Museum of Art's** 75th anniversary with an exhibition of contemporary Spanish artist Félix de la Concha. See masterpieces, including Jackson Pollock's *Night Mist*, at **Norton Museum of Art**. The Palm Beaches' quintessential cultural experiences make your beach vacation as enriching as it is relaxing.

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The **Palm Beach Opera**, the oldest performing arts organization in Palm Beach County, has provided South Florida with the power of live opera for over 60 years. The 2025 season includes performances of *Roméo et Juliette* and *La Traviata*—classic productions for those new to opera and connoisseurs alike.

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(Left): A woman stands among the ruins in Petra, Jordan. (Top) A group of travelers with Impulse Travel play drums in Colombia. (Lower Left) A man holds an authentic Panamanian hat in La Pintada, Panama. (Lower Right) A woman holds a group of banana leaves in Krabi, Thailand.

Art by **RAY DAK LAM**

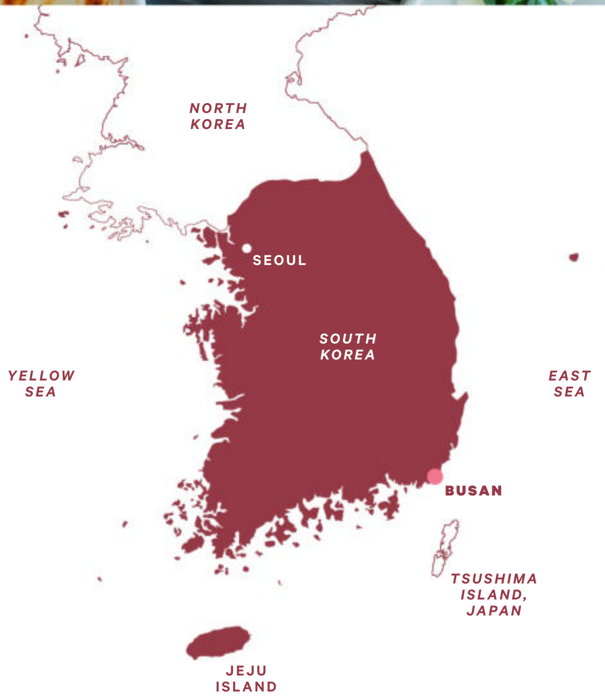
SECOND TO NONE

Often bypassed in favor of shinier Seoul, the South Korean city of Busan—known for its beaches, bathhouses, and rich history—is a destination all its own.

by PEGGY ORENSTEIN

Photographs by JUN MICHAEL PARK

Illustrations by SOLJI LEE



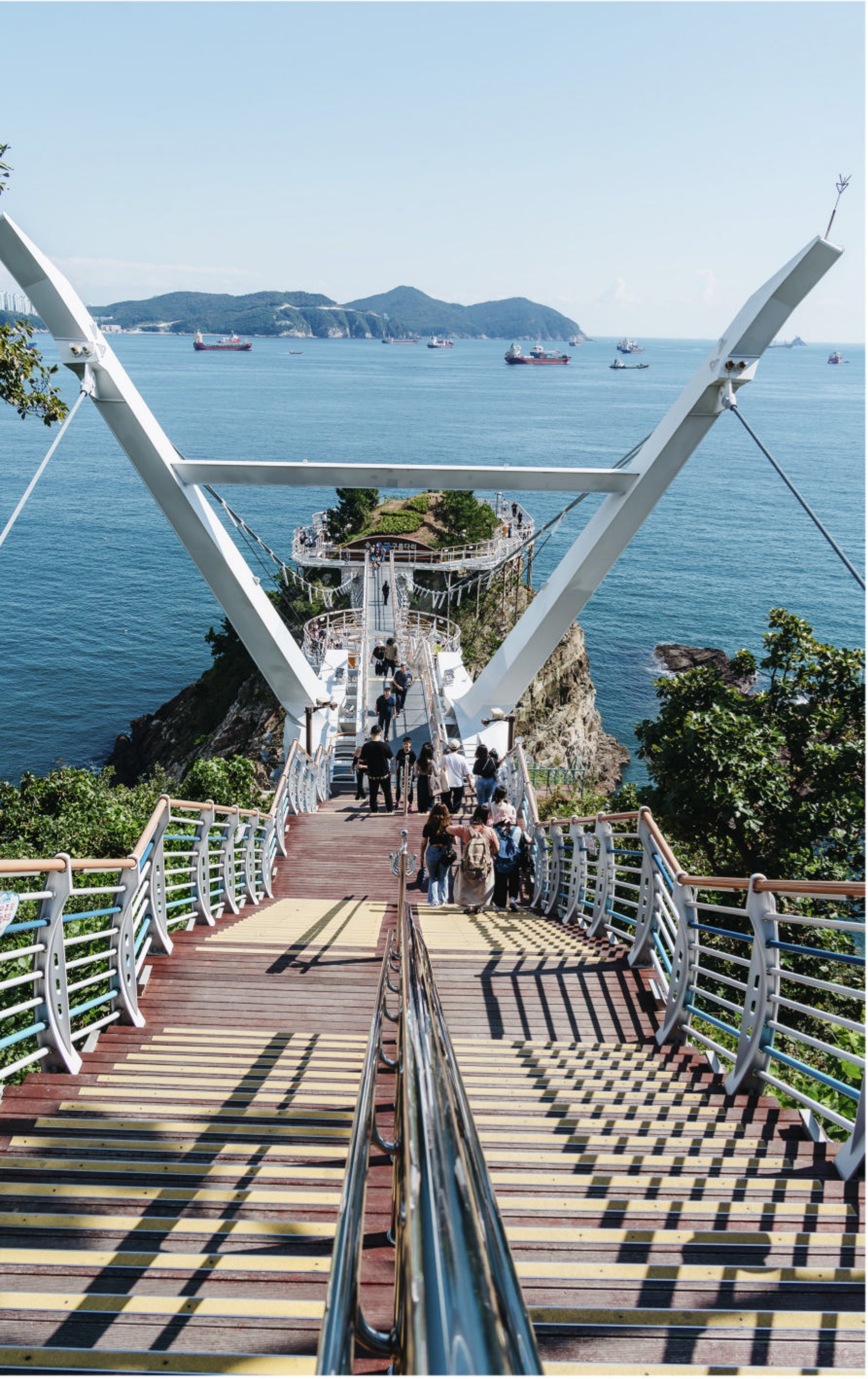
A FRIEND ONCE told me this about her approach to teaching high school history: "If you start with George Washington, you may never get to Abigail Adams. But if you start with Abigail, you'll eventually get to George." Begin with the obvious, essentially, and you might never go beyond it. I feel similarly about travel.

For decades, I've made it my practice to visit a country's "second" attractions first. Starting slightly further afield leads me to something richer, more unexpected. In this age of overtourism, it's also a way to avoid the disappointing throngs at classic locales, and to give some relief to the exhausted locals. I may have to search a bit harder for things to do, see, or eat, but the payoff is often a relationship to a place less popularized with American travelers.

It's why I spent weeks in Hiroshima, Japan, before getting to know Tokyo; I tooled around Bydgoszcz, Poland, before setting foot in Warsaw. And it's why last summer, on my first trip to Korea, I skipped Seoul and flew south to Busan, a port town of about 3.4 million people that sits between the East Sea and Mount Geumjeong.

I was drawn to Busan by the promise of natural beauty and urban bustle—beaches and hiking trails, museums and markets, spas and temples—as well as its history. Japan launched its occupation of Korea from Busan, fully colonizing the country between 1910 and the end of World War II.

In 1950, a few years after liberation, the Soviet-backed Northern troops captured the entire peninsula during the Korean War of 1950–1953—except for the slice around Busan, which U.S.-led international forces held strong. The city became the Republic's temporary capital. The legacy of tranquility and turbulence, I'd heard, gave Busanites a reputation for pragmatism as well as for warmth. It also, apparently, made Busan a city unlike any other in Korea, a place where visitors can feel like time travelers, immersed at once in a complicated past and a vibrant present.



Clockwise from far left: In Busan, red crab is one of the many things on offer at the all-seafood Jagalchi Market; Songdo Yonggung Suspension Bridge connects Dongseom island with Amnam Park; Yeongdo is located on the water; lotus lanterns are common near Beomeosa Temple.

Pages 88–89: The residential area of Marine City has some of the most coveted real estate in Busan.

This page: Stalls in Bupyeong Kkangtong Market serve *tteokbokki* (chewy rice cakes) and *eomuk* (fish cakes), a specialty of Busan.

Opposite page: Fishmonger Young-sik Kim used to work in Seoul but returned to his hometown of Busan for the improved quality of life.

BUSAN CURLS ALONG the coastline, long and thin, stretching from the newer beach resorts of the north through a buzzy cosmopolitan center to the older neighborhoods of the south. I started at the bottom, where my hotel was a quick stroll from the mainland across a drawbridge on Yeongdo Island.

Yeongdo is an area in transition, a working port where upscale restaurants in renovated warehouses have sprung up next to dimly lit shipyard suppliers. My first morning, I wandered the narrow backstreets, past stacks of neatly folded fishing nets and piles of anchor chains with links as thick as my arm. The clang of hammers mixed with bird calls drifted up from the harbor. I stopped at the flagship branch of Samjin, Korea's most famous purveyor of *eomuk*—a savory baked patty of seafood kneaded with flour and vegetables. An affordable staple during postwar food shortages and a specialty of Busan, in recent years it has evolved into something considerably more decadent: My pick was wrapped in bacon and served on a skewer, a handy portable breakfast to eat while walking.

I cut back toward the docks to Momos, a café, roastery, and museum. Coffee has long been more popular than tea in Korea, and partly because rent is lower in Busan than Seoul, a thriving community of artisan-minded baristas has convened in Yeongdo, reportedly opening more than 200 cafés in under 5.5 square miles; Momos is often considered its epicenter. I chose a custom blend of beans for my latte, then settled into a sling chair to watch the tugboats while breathing in the sea air. I'd been in town less than 12 hours, but already I felt at ease.

This place was not always so idyllic. During the Korean War, as the communist army advanced, more than half a million refugees streamed into Busan from throughout the country, doubling its population in a few short years. There was little room in an already crowded, war-ravaged city. People lived where they could, many squatting in the central neighborhood of Nampo-dong.

Their story is told through artifacts, photos, film, and dioramas at the Busan Modern History Museum, located about a half-hour walk from Yeongdo in a modernist building first erected by the colonizing Japanese. Poverty bred desperation and crime, but also ingenuity: People survived by selling what they could, especially smuggled foreign goods, either on the street or in makeshift stalls at Gukje Market, a few blocks back toward the water.

Today, Gukje is among the largest markets in Korea, its warren of pedestrian alleys a kaleidoscope of sights, sounds, and smells. When I visited, tables overflowed with bedding or stuffed animals, with hats, housewares, ceramic figurines. One vendor sold only umbrellas, zillions of them. Another seemed entirely stocked with piggy banks. A stall no larger than a phone booth was packed floor to ceiling with jars of Pond's cold cream, boxes of black hair dye, and cans of Aqua Net hair spray. There was barely room inside for the elderly proprietor, who sat on a stool facing the wall, her hair in curlers.

I crossed into the adjacent Bupyeong Kkangtong Market (*kkangtong* translates to "tin can," named for the U.S. Army castoffs once commonly sold there) with its funk of fish, luscious peaches, elaborate braids of garlic, and bins of fermented foods. Older women—sometimes called, not entirely politely, *ajummas*—served up scallion pancakes, deep-fried shrimp, and *tteokbokki* (chewy rice cakes simmered in a spicy-sweet chili broth) to customers who perched on low plastic stools at the tables that lined the streets.

At a food cart, I pointed to a *hotteok*, a fried pastry filled with cinnamon, sugar, and chopped nuts. Greasy, sweet ambrosia. Farther along, fortune tellers had set up shop; I peeked into a tent where a pair of teenage girls gripped each other's hands, eyes wide, while a woman with flowing, red-dyed hair conjured their futures.

The market was bigger, more entrenched, but its character hadn't changed much from the photos in the history

I wondered how much longer these places would last and what would be lost when their face-to-face exchanges, their cacophony, and their serendipity disappeared.

museum, making it feel like the present was collapsing into the past at every turn. Was I in 2024 or 1984 or 1954? I stumbled across an entire street devoted to used bookstores. The Strand in New York City claims to hold 18 miles of books in a 55,000-square-foot space; each of these shops seemed to have at least that many jammed into what were basically oversize closets.

It was hard to believe that any of these vendors exist in the digital age, when their goods could be cleanly purchased with the click of a mouse. I wondered how much longer these places would last and what would be lost when their face-to-face exchanges, their cacophony, and their serendipity disappeared. Things always change, I know. But I was glad to be here before they did.

* * *

KOREAN CUISINE IS often associated with beef: bulgogi or *kalbi* or the do-it-yourself braziers that leave your hair and skin redolent of smoke. But Busan's big flex is seafood. Jagalchi, a few blocks from Gukje, is the country's largest all-seafood market.

Just before lunch on my second day, I walked among its dozens of stalls, feeling both awed and slightly despairing over how many creatures were yanked from the ocean each day: fish, shellfish, eels, octopi, sea slugs, things I could name and things I could not, many still alive. Visitors pick what strikes their fancy, then head to the market's second floor to have it transformed into a meal. I couldn't eat enough on my own to do the experience justice, so I brought in reinforcements: friends Sae and Alex Wilmer. We'd met in the San Francisco Bay Area, but they now spend much of the year in Busan, where Sae grew up.

At a booth near the middle of the market, we asked fishmonger Young-sik Kim for recommendations. He scooped up a king crab, tiger shrimp, geoduck, and an octopus, dumping them into a shallow, plastic basket.

"What's that?" I asked, pointing to a fat, pink, squirmy thing.

"A penis fish," Sae said, grinning. "It's a kind of ocean worm." I gestured for one to go in the basket.

Through Sae helping to translate, Kim told me that he'd started his career as a chef in Seoul, but the cost of opening a restaurant there was prohibitive, so 18 years ago he returned to Busan, his hometown. "I love it," he said. "It's not as crowded as Seoul, it's more relaxed. And I love the people."

When our basket was brimful, we went upstairs to a room with dozens of tables topped with plastic sheeting. Above them, orange lamps printed with white numbers hung from the ceiling, each indicating a restaurant; ours was 39. You don't choose your restaurant at Jagalchi, and you don't choose how your seafood is prepared; it simply arrives. Within seconds of sitting down, we were served *sannakji*: chopped, raw octopus tentacles doused in sesame oil, still wriggling from long-firing neurons. I popped one into my mouth, where it began to crawl, then clamped down hard on my cheek. Later that evening, I would read that several people die annually eating sannakji, choking when a tentacle adheres to their throat. ("That's why I told you chew, chew, chew," Alex said when I relayed that fact. "At least I thought I did.")

The rest of the meal tasted like ocean waves dancing across my tongue. Bitter orange sea squirts with a sweet finish. Velvety grilled abalone and scallops. Rice fried with creamy crab innards. The penis fish was served raw, still moving, along with crunchy sea cucumber. I tried a nibble, dipped in tangy red *cho-gochujang* sauce.

The aptly named Bosu-dong Book Street is filled with bookstores and dates to the 1950s. It began when refugees from North Korea opened a few stalls.

Sae told me that moving to Seoul from Busan sometimes tempts her, but she'd never actually do it. "I can't live without an ocean nearby," she said. "And in Busan we have access to the freshest seafood, the most beautiful beaches."

The next morning Sae took me to Songdo, Korea's first public beach, established in 1913. We'd planned to relax on the shore, but on a whim, bought tickets for a 20-minute cable car ride over the water to Amnam Park, a former military outpost that's been converted into densely forested trails, coastal observation decks, and picnic areas. The panorama from our glass-bottomed compartment was exhilarating: the golden sand with the mountains beyond; fishing boats tootling below; a boardwalk winding along the shore.

At the park, most of our fellow riders congregated by the snack bars or rambled onto a nearby observation deck that jutted into the water. Sae and I turned the opposite direction to follow a "Healing Forest Trail of Contemplation" that took us along the coast, revealing an expanse of tourmaline blue ocean. One of the only other hikers we encountered was a college student from Germany, her lip pierced, her hair dyed purple, who was on a break from studying in Seoul. "What do you think of this city?" I asked her. She smiled broadly. "Busan is just . . ." She shook her head, at a loss for words, then extended her arms and tipped back her head: *"Ahhhhhh!"*

국제시장
GUKJE MARKET
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GUKJE MARKET

ON MY FOURTH DAY, looking for a different perspective, I cabbed up from Yeongdo to Haeundae Beach, in Busan's north. It called to mind Waikīkī—skyscrapers and nightlife edged by a glorious near-mile of white sand. During my visit in late June the ocean was still cold, the beach not too crowded. I checked in at the Paradise Hotel where my room was smack on the shore, a few floors up. That evening, I had an unobstructed view from my balcony as the sunset turned the sky, the water, and the mirrored buildings along the strand a fluorescent pink. I could easily have spent the following days at the hotel's saunas and open-air baths, but I had a different destination in mind.

Busan is home to the country's biggest *jjimjilbang*, or Korean-style bathhouse—Spa Land, a two-story extravaganza of 22 thermal baths, 13 saunas, and multiple relaxation rooms, along with a restaurant and a café. Centers of community as well as repose and wellness, jjimjilbang

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다모아문구
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are essential to Korean culture: Friends go together to unwind, as do families, spending hours or even overnight soaking, steaming, napping, and eating. There is ample time for it all; Spa Land is open from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily.

After a brief orientation, I stripped and showered in the women's locker room. I entered a steamy room filled with shallow pools that promised benefits such as relieving neuralgia, improving circulation, detoxification, and shinier hair. I eased into one, then another, then a third, intending to try them all, though I wimped out on the cold plunge. Beyond

Gukje Market was founded in 1945 and has continuously operated since then. Today it spans 12 buildings and is one of the largest markets in South Korea.

THE AFAR GUIDE TO

BUSAN

Seoul may glitter with K-pop and Gangnam style, but Korea's second-largest metropolis sparkles in its own way. Spend your days absorbing its wartime history, wandering the outdoor markets, dining on seafood, rejuvenating at a spa, or hiking secluded coastal trails before lolling on the white-sand beaches. —*PO*

WHERE TO STAY

The 532-room **Paradise Hotel** on Haeundae Beach has spacious rooms with a right-on-the-water view. The spa facilities—rooftop baths, an outdoor swimming pool—are among the best in the city. Check in, grab a coffee, stroll to the end of the beach, and take in the scenery on a half-mile circular walk around Dongbaek Island.

The rooms at the **Park Hyatt**, located in a sleek skyscraper on the Busan marina, feature minimalist decor with floor-to-ceiling windows. Watch the Gwangan Bridge's twice-nightly light shows from the coziness of your bed or while floating in the indoor pool.

The **Lavalse Hotel** in Yeongdo is well situated for exploring historic Nampo-dong; the tradeoff is less luxury than elsewhere in town, but the convenience is worth it. Go for a corner room with an ocean view or, better yet, a suite.

WHERE TO EAT

Busan-born chef JaeHoon Kim opened **Palate** in late 2019: not, he admits, the best timing. It was especially sweet, then, when in 2024 the restaurant became one of the first in Busan to receive a Michelin star. His changing menu has included Korean radish pie and beef grilled over *binchotan* charcoal, plated with caramel chicken liquor.

Momos is arguably the best of the trendy cafés springing up in the Yeongdo district. Order a drink, add a pastry, and choose your view: Face one direction to watch coffee beans being roasted, turn another to watch the boats chugging around the harbor.

For traditional Busan fare, go hungry to **Gukje Market Food Street**. Point to whatever strikes your fancy—scallion pancakes, *gimbap* rice rolls, grilled scallops—then take your place at the tables that line the street. For chewy *milmyeon* (wheat noodles in chilled broth, introduced by Northern refugees) head a bit farther afield to **Naeho Naengmyeon** restaurant; for *dwaeji gukbap*, a pork and rice soup, try **Hapcheon Gukbapjip**. The *tteokbokki* (rice cakes) at **Sanggukine** in Haeundae Market are renowned for their mix of sweet and spicy. **Jagalchi Market** is a must for seafood.

WHAT TO DO

F1963, a former wire factory (erected in its namesake year), has been transformed into an industrial-chic cultural center with galleries, a bookstore, an art library, and a bamboo grove, its walking path made of repurposed concrete from the former factory floor.

The city melts away on the 2.9-mile **Igidae Coastal Trail**, a moderately challenging, beautiful hike through the forest and along the water. If you start early, you may spy a few of the last remaining *haenyeo*: members of a centuries-old culture of women who free dive for seafood, holding their breath for up to three minutes.

Soak up history at the **Provisional Capital Memorial Hall**, originally built in 1926 during the Japanese occupation. The temporary home of South Korea's first president has been preserved along with exhibits of historical photos of wartime life, a re-creation of a refugee's shanty, and an outdoor school.

Counted among the world's largest bathhouses is the two-story **Spa Land**, where a $14 ticket provides four hours of access to 22 baths (fed from thermal springs more than a half mile underground), 13 themed saunas, footbaths, a restaurant, and a café. Add on a classic *seshin* body scrub and massage, and you will leave feeling smooth as a baby.

Beomeosa Temple, in the hills just outside Busan, is especially stunning in the fall, as the foliage ascends Mount Geumjeong, and in May, when the wisteria blooms. Travelers can also stay overnight to meditate, share meals, learn more about the temple's Seon sect, and participate in the 108 prostrations. (Overnight spaces are limited, so book well in advance at *templestay.com* or email *beomeosa@templestay.com*.)

the slight temperature differences, I couldn't much tell one from another, though the overall effect was relaxing.

After a half hour, I was called for my optional *seshin*, a full-body scrub delivered by an ajumma wearing the standard jjimjilbang uniform of black lace bra and underwear and wielding her exfoliating mitt like a weapon. I lay on a table, surrendering as she removed my dead skin head to toe, the evidence sluiced off with warm water in silver-gray strips. Fifty minutes later, I tottered out pink and aglow, tenderized as a lesser slab of meat.

> **I felt a surge of gratitude for Busan, like I had made a new friend.**

Spa Land's saunas each have a theme: The Wave Dream Room uses projection to simulate the bottom of an ocean; the walls in the Pyramid Room are pitched at 52 degrees to "absorb universal energy at maximum." I changed into the shorts and T-shirt I was given on arrival for the coed areas, then followed the instructions near a pile of hand towels, rolling one into a hat that resembled a pair of ram's horns. It did absorb sweat, but the real point was play, and I smiled seeing a bunch of adults walking around in "sheep heads."

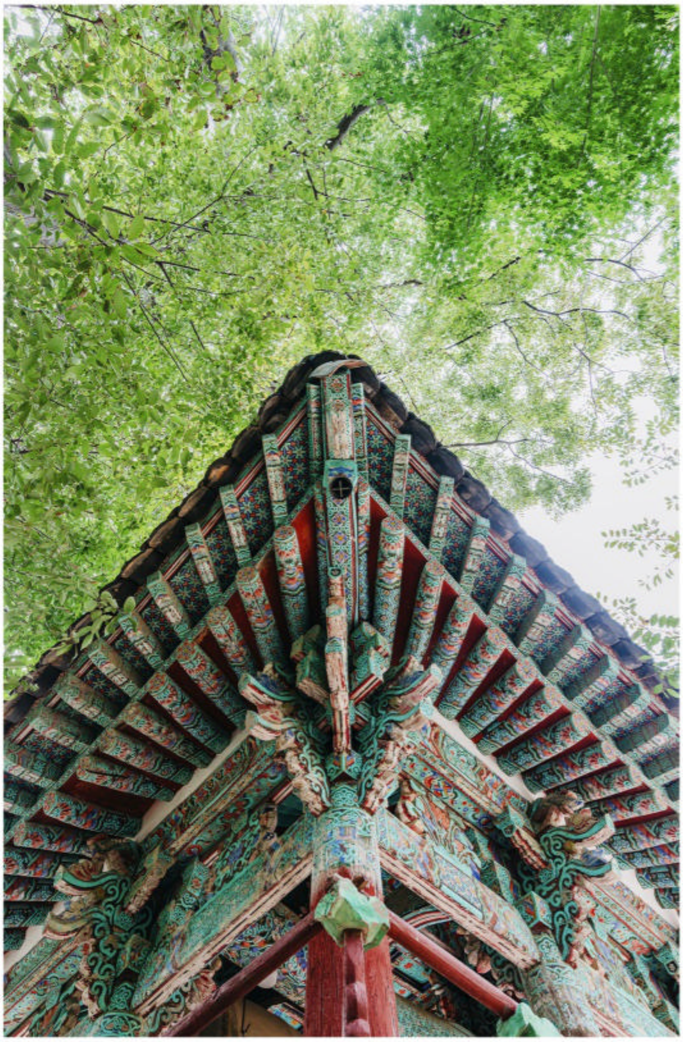
I took a break from the heat in a plant-filled atrium, dangling my legs in a cooling footbath while enjoying the classic spa snack of a slow-cooked hard-boiled egg. Then I climbed into a hammock chair suspended above the water and fell fast asleep.

◆

ON MY LAST MORNING, my friend Sae offered to show me a quieter side of the city: Beomeosa Temple, built in the 7th century and a city bus ride up the foothills of Mount Geumjeong. In the class of Korea's most significant temples, it's also home to a school of "fighting monks," renowned for their resistance against Japanese invaders in the 16th and early 20th centuries. The parking lot was empty when we arrived, the forest cool and quiet.

Walking up a path lined with Japanese maples, wild wisteria, and hydrangeas, I could hear the rhythmic beating of a *moktak*, a wooden drum that chanting monks use to keep time. The buildings on the temple grounds were a riot of color—covered in *dancheong*, intricate designs in red, yellow, blue, black, and white.

A gathering of worshippers sat cross-legged on the floor of one hall. Behind another building, a different group gestured to us, insisting we share their slices of watermelon, and we did, nodding and smiling our thanks. I made my way up a flight of stairs, then turned to gaze across the mist-shrouded mountain, listening to the moktak and focusing on the rise and fall of my breath.



This page: Traditional decorative Korean *dancheong* art adorns Beomeosa Temple.

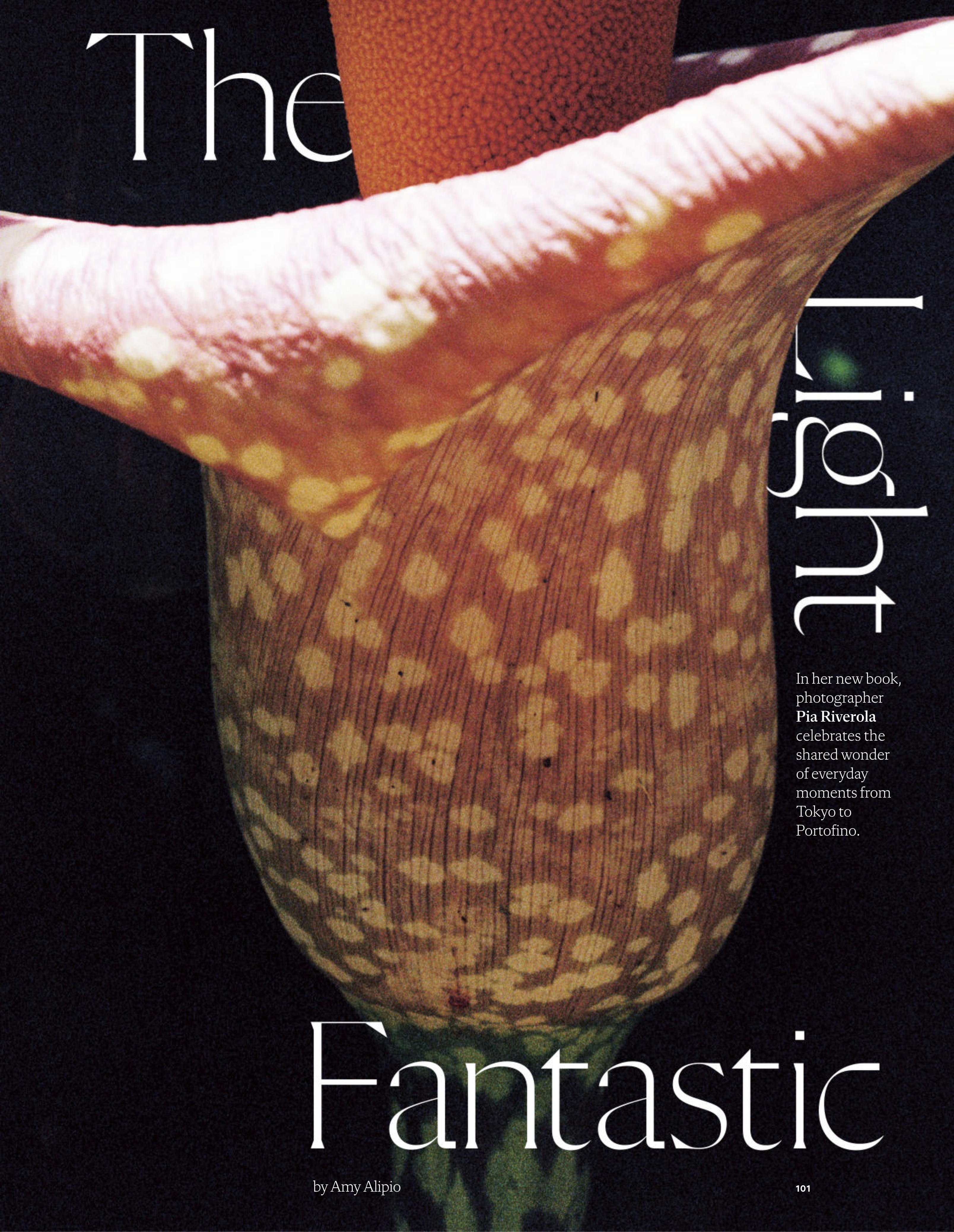
Opposite page: The Songdo Cloud Walk, a nearly 1,200-foot bridge, extends over the sea.

After a few meditative minutes, I rejoined Sae and descended through a bamboo grove, past a vegetable garden, and into a dining hall where volunteers offered us a free lunch of vegan bibimbap: steamed rice topped with fresh and pickled vegetables, edamame, tofu, and a dollop of fiery gochujang. The meal was simple but delectable. We washed our dishes and said our goodbyes; it was time for me to head to the airport.

Hours later, as my plane ascended, I looked down at the sandy beaches, the skyscrapers, the green of the hills. I felt a surge of gratitude for Busan, like I had made a new friend. I was already eager to return, to delve deeper into its history, perhaps venture to the islands and forests that lie beyond its urban core. Would I ever make it to Korea's main megalopolis? Maybe, though now I knew for certain it would be fine if I didn't. I didn't need to tick a prescribed box to get a taste of this country's soul. I felt like I'd found it, right here.

Contributing writer Peggy Orenstein covered Slovenia's Juliana Trail for the Fall 2023 issue of Afar. Jun Michael Park is a photographer from South Korea. Follow him on Instagram @junmichaelpark.

The Light Fantastic



In her new book, photographer **Pia Riverola** celebrates the shared wonder of everyday moments from Tokyo to Portofino.

by Amy Alipio

A **LACE TABLECLOTH IN SICILY,** a taxi seat in Japan, a single bloom in Barcelona: Spanish photographer Pia Riverola's attention to light and shadow transforms commonplace objects into images of delight and warmth. These daily details form the subject of her second book, *Días* (Loose Joints, 2024), which draws from her travels in some of the world's most popular destinations.

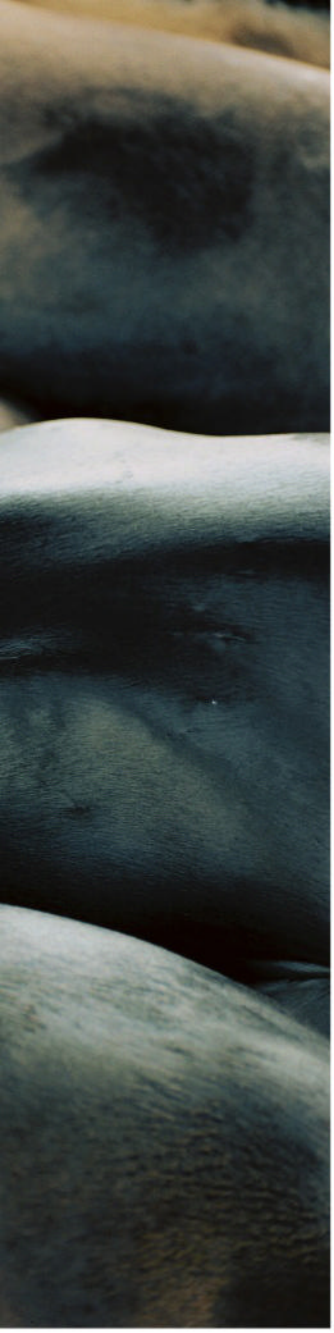
"I love spaces frequented by locals, rather than those dictated by trends," Riverola says. "Even if these places don't have the most extraordinary cuisine or breathtaking views, they offer something more profound—a genuine connection and sense of place."

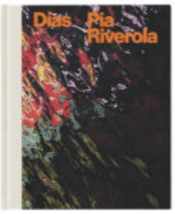
Born in Barcelona, the 35-year-old photographer credits her grandfather for inspiring her love of photography. When she was 12, he gave her a Minolta camera, which she started carrying with her to school and on family trips. Riverola moved to New York City after college and began photographing everyday life to help keep friends and family updated: "It felt almost like journaling, but with photos," she says.

Riverola now photographs fashion campaigns for Calvin Klein, Loewe, and Balenciaga and is based in Los Angeles and Mexico City.

Shot over the course of six years and 17 countries (plus the continent of Antarctica), the images in *Días* are presented without captions. "While you can notice the distinctiveness of each place," she says, "one image subtly leads to another."

The key to finding authenticity when traveling, Riverola explains, is embracing spontaneity. "These days, trips often become packed itineraries filled with countless reservations," she says. "If I become more open to accepting and appreciating whatever comes my way, it leads to genuine joy and a more unexpected and exciting experience."





Page 100: "When looking for restaurants online, I am drawn to the charm of a place with few reviews, rather than the widely celebrated spots," photographer Pia Riverola says. In a photo of a busy, neon-lit restaurant in **Tokyo**, viewers can almost hear the hum of conversation.

Page 101: Corpse flowers bloom once every four to 10 years, and for only about 48 hours. Riverola photographed this infamously pungent tropical plant during its ephemeral flowering at Lyon Arboretum in **O'ahu, Hawai'i**. "I remember thinking how lucky I was to experience it," she says.

Above, far left and far right: By focusing on ordinary moments—a child gathering plants in a garden in **Laos**, a couple enjoying a sun-soaked day by the water in **Portofino, Italy**—Riverola spotlights the human bonds that cross borders. "I believe there are certain habits and routines that transcend location," she says. "Practices that everyone engages in, regardless of context."

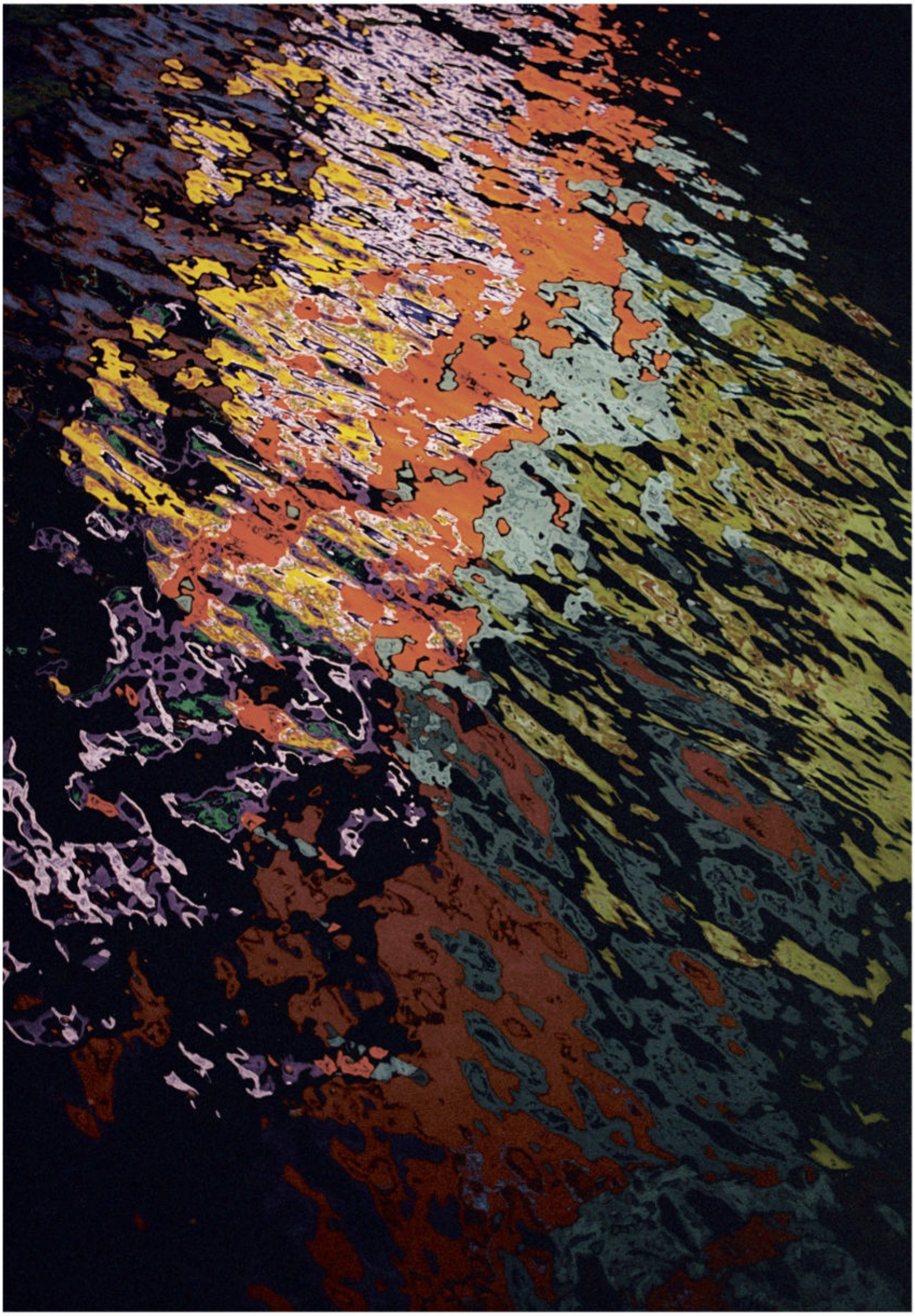
Above, center: "In the **Galápagos Islands**, while on assignment, I found a variety of animals living in their natural habitat, mostly untouched by human interference," Riverola says. "Sea lions lounged under the midday sun, resting peacefully beside the water, where they would soon bathe and swim in the warm equatorial currents."

▲ The photographs in Pia Riverola's book *Días* (Loose Joints, 2024) use motion, blur, and dappled light to evoke specific emotions.

誠興
麻雀公司
宏發燒臘
海天堂
吉祥
SALON

Left: In **Hong Kong**, red-roofed public buses inch along a busy street.

Above: **Isla Isabela in the Galápagos** is home to colonies of American flamingos. The stilt-legged birds are best spotted at Flamingo Lagoon.



Above: Riverola travels frequently to Japan, in part because she is drawn to the country's "unique blend of modernity and tradition." She shot this image in **Osaka**.

Right: In a remote area of **Colombia**, Riverola captured a joyful ride. "Their smiles were radiant against the breathtaking backdrop of the canyon roads winding along the Guáitara River in Ipiales. The simple beauty of that fleeting moment left an indelible impression." Ⓐ

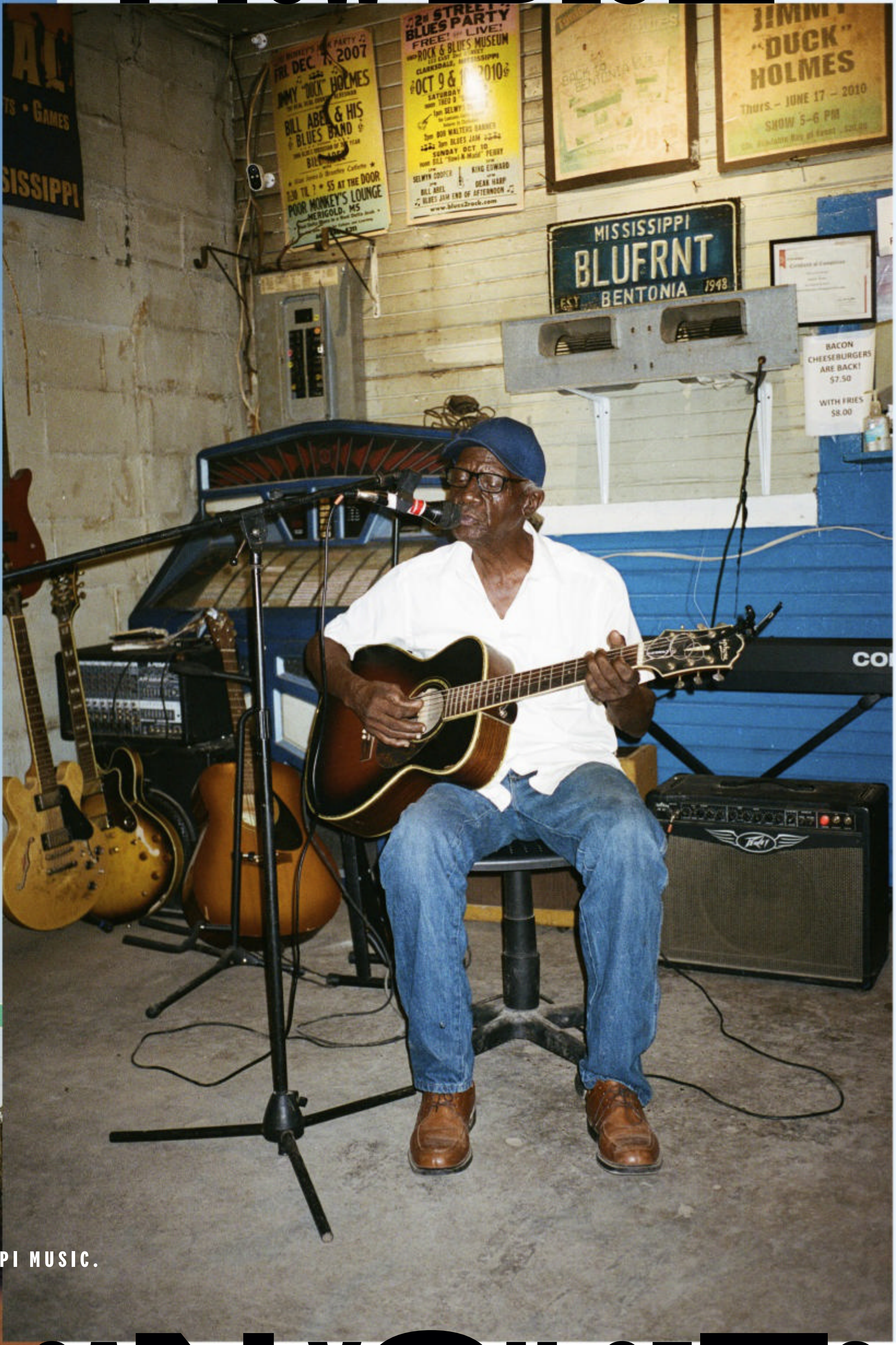
Amy Alipio is a travel writer and the former managing editor of National Geographic Travel.

DIESEL
DIESEL
DIESEL
DIESEL

HOTEL
KING
EDWARD
MAYFLOWER
CAFE
SEA FOOD

WRITER AND MUSICIAN **EMMA JOHN** TRAVELS SOUTH TO FIND THE BEAT—AND BIRTHPLACE—OF A SPECIAL

HOW BLUE CAN YOU GET?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JIMMY "DUCK" HOLMES
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KIND OF MISSISSIPPI MUSIC.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MIRANDA BARNES

H

HIS NAME'S Edward Antoine, the man who's singing, but he calls himself King Edward, just like the historic hotel a mile away. He just turned 87, and though he must sit down to perform, his voice still sparks and crackles like autumn leaves. The house band behind him, most members young enough to be his grandchildren, keep the beat. The crowd at Hal & Mal's in Jackson, Mississippi, whoops with pleasure at the end of every stanza.

"What you have to learn about the blues," says Bobby Rush, the man sitting next to me, "is it ain't just something to make you sad. Because the same thing that will make you laugh is the same thing that will make you cry." Rush, 91, has just won his third Grammy award, so I listen to what he says. "You love your mama, don't you?" he asks gnomically. "You don't love the blues, you don't love your mama."

With apologies to my mother, I have never loved the blues. But then I've barely listened to the blues before now. Sure, I can recognize the genre—its form is one of the most instantly identifiable of all musical genres. The shuffling rhythm of the guitar, the steady walking of the bass, the melismatic voice pouring out emotions: Blues is the sound of history, created by Black American musicians in the 1890s, with roots in work songs and spirituals, and later gospel.

But it has remained a distant musical form for me. I'm hoping this trip will change that. As a fiddle player, I'm a regular visitor to the U.S. South, chasing the sounds that shape it. When I learned Mississippi had a Blues Trail honoring the people and places that secured the music's legacy, I booked a flight from my home in London.

The state's Blues Trail began in 2006 with just three historical markers; today, there are more than 200. Hal & Mal's, which has hosted live blues performances for more than 40 years, is one of the trail's newest honorees.

This is how I end up next to Rush, whose seven-decade career as a singer and songwriter is celebrated with its own marker a couple of miles from here. He just returned from touring three hours ago, he says, so he's a little tired, but he wanted to make the effort to go out because his friend Paul is visiting. Paul, it turns out, runs a blues festival in Maine and is fanatical about the music genre's history. Paul has visited every marker on the Mississippi Blues Trail.

My goal is more modest—a weeklong road trip to some of the trail's key sites. While the blues has no single origin story, the Deep South is certainly one of the places it was born. Many of its pioneers learned from each other while sharecropping on plantations in the Mississippi Delta. If I ever hope to feel this music, I want to better understand where it comes from.

Onstage, a harmonica player digs so deep into a solo he ends up on his knees. "You don't just play the blues," the musician tells the crowd, "you live it."

T

THE NEXT MORNING, I head for the town of Bentonia. Bobby Rush's music travels with me. "My love for you is so doggone strong," he sings in his 1971 song "Chicken Heads," flowing through my car speakers. "Like the Mississippi River it rolls on and on."

Thirty miles north of Jackson I pull off Highway 49 and find the cinder block building I'm looking for. A dark blue plaque stands a few feet from its concrete porch, confirming its credentials: The Blue Front Cafe is the oldest surviving juke joint in Mississippi. There's no agreed-on etymology of "juke," but by the early 20th century it came to represent a live music venue that was more house party than formal club.

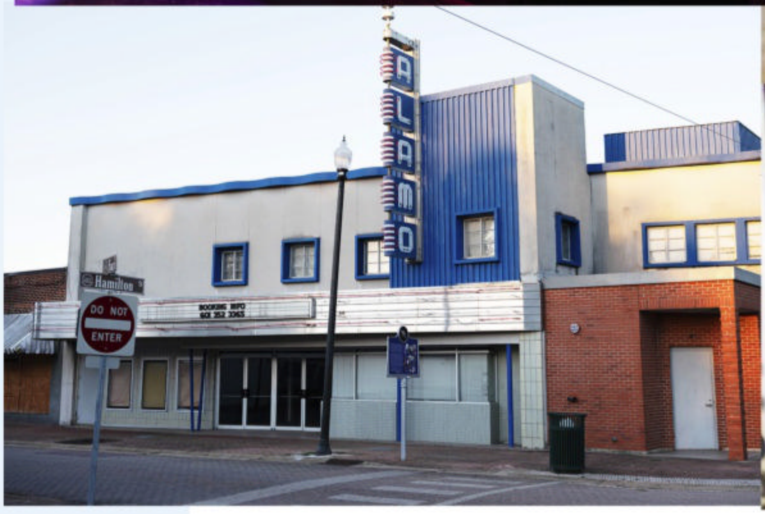
There are no customers inside, just an elderly gentleman in a cap, sitting on a stool and looking up at a shelf lined with tubs of dill pickles and pigs' feet. He heads behind the counter to serve me a Coke and gets himself a soda. This is Jimmy "Duck" Holmes, and his parents founded this place in 1948.

Holmes, 77, inherited the live music café when his father died in 1970. Bentonia's distinctive blues style—haunting, minor-key melodies rendered in a high falsetto—was evidently inspired by a World War I veteran named Henry Stuckey and passed along to musicians including Skip James and Holmes himself. Today, Holmes is the last of the Bentonia bluesmen.

ONSTAGE, A HARMONICA PLAYER DIGS SO DEEP INTO A SOLO HE ENDS UP ON HIS KNEES. "YOU

Page 108: The King Edward Hotel originally opened in 1923 in Jackson, Mississippi. **Page 109:** Jimmy "Duck" Holmes has run the annual Bentonia Blues Festival for more than 50 years.

HAL'S
The City with Soul



ALAMO
Hamilton
DO NOT ENTER
BOOKING INFO

Ma Rainey
Queen of Blues
1886-1939

This page, clockwise from top left: The Mississippi State Fair in Jackson; patrons outside the Blue Front Cafe in Bentonia; guitars in the Blue Front Cafe in Bentonia; Hal & Mal's; Alamo Theatre in Jackson; a Blue Monday show at Hal & Mal's.

DON'T JUST PLAY THE BLUES," THE MUSICIAN TELLS THE CROWD, "YOU LIVE IT."

Each June, the Bentonia Blues Festival he founded in 1972 gathers hundreds of attendees in front of the porch for three days, with open-mic jamming all afternoon and a long lineup of regional musicians performing in the evenings. Other times of the year, music here tends to be a spontaneous affair, and it can be chance whether you happen to come by on a day when Holmes will be playing with his buddies. But he's happy to arrange sessions in advance for the tour groups he shows around most weeks.

"I'm just proud to have contributed something," he says. "Even when I'm gone, this place'll be here." He walks me around the photographs and posters that cover the walls, and I ask him which of the many guitars in the corner are his. "All of them," he says, laughing. A TV blares out news headlines—war, poverty, inequality. Hard times are always with us, I think: Maybe this is why the blues endures.

A

A FEW MILES OUT OF BENTONIA I cross into the Mississippi Delta, and the terrain changes from thick and green to wide and flat. The view changes with it—fields of cotton and trees rising out of swampland. From this isolated landscape emerged the Delta blues, whose distinctively raw sound I hear in the tiny town of Leland, home to the Highway 61 Blues Museum.

Outside the museum stands a marker to the bluesman James "Son" Thomas, who worked as a porter here in the early 1960s, when the building was the Montgomery Hotel. I step inside, and a guitar rasps out minor chords: Thomas's son, Pat, often plays for visitors in the entrance hall. He sits and sings words his father wrote, his Mississippi accent eliding the vowels so that many of the words remain a mystery.

But you don't need to understand the lyrics to feel the yearning within them, and I'm amazed how much meaning can be packed into a simple, repeated phrase. "Beefsteak when I'm hungry," Pat sings, "and whiskey when I'm dry." The best blues songs are perfectly honed short stories of hardship—"I asked for water, she brought me gasoline"—but some of them still celebrate the little wins in life.

Highway 61 is known as the Blues Highway because it took so many musicians from small towns to Memphis, St. Louis,

The Mississippi Delta region sits in the northwest part of the state between the Mississippi and Yazoo rivers.

and Chicago. The Great Migration, between 1910 and 1970, saw 6 million Black Americans move from the rural South to the industrial cities farther north in search of a better life outside the Jim Crow laws that dominated daily life in the region. The blues traveled with them, evolving and electrifying in new urban environments. It's a history wonderfully told in Indianola, the hometown of blues legend B.B. King, just 20 minutes east of Leland. Born Riley B. King, early in his career he was given the nickname "Beale Street Blues Boy," which was shortened to "Blues Boy," and finally B.B.

In 1935, at 10 years old, King was singing at church and working the cotton fields with his family of sharecroppers. In the late 1940s he hitchhiked to Memphis, before building his career on the "Chitlin' Circuit." The informal network of venues developed in response to segregation, which not only divided audiences by race but frequently excluded Black audiences and artists from "white" venues altogether. Club Ebony in Indianola, an important waypoint on the Chitlin' Circuit, has been continuously open since the late 1940s, except for a brief period of renovation; the B.B. King Museum—which opened in Indianola in 2008—oversaw the renovation.

King was passionate about his Delta home, and even arranged to be buried on the museum grounds. He was laid to rest there in 2015 and lingers in other ways, too. After visiting the eponymous museum, I stop at the nearby restaurant Betty's Place, where my fried chicken is brought to the table by Betty herself. It turns out she was King's cook for two decades.

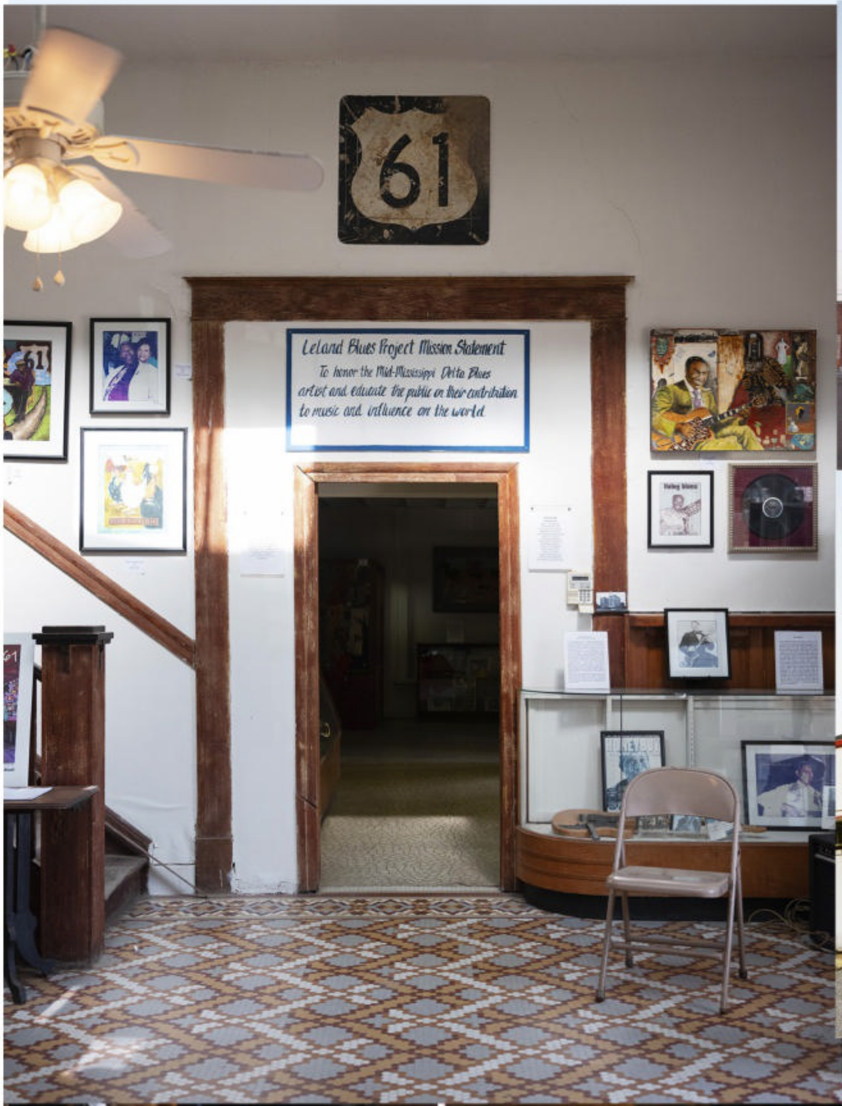
By early evening, I arrive in downtown Cleveland, Mississippi, home to art galleries, boutiques, and the Delta State University campus, whose music institute has serious credibility, including a recording facility to rival Abbey Road. Since 2016, the campus grounds have housed the Grammy Museum Mississippi, a vast structure full of interactive exhibits. (It also has a Blues Trail marker.)

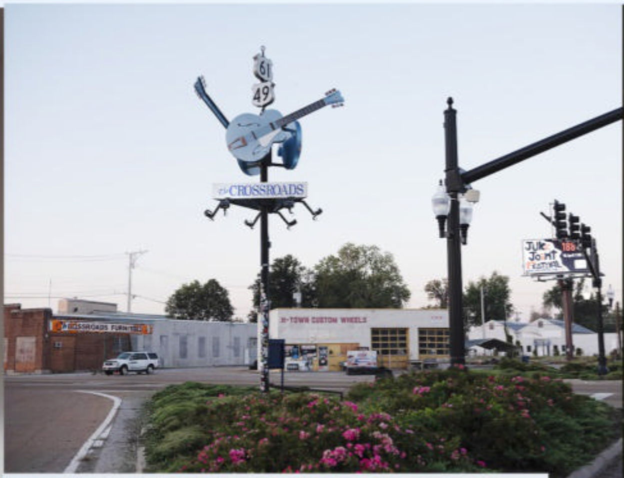
In the rooftop bar of the Cotton House Hotel, I meet music professor Barry Bays, who has played bass for numerous famous blues musicians, from Willie King to Charlie Musselwhite. I tell him about my trip and he asks if I've been to Dockery Farms. "That's where the blues was born, after all," Bays says.

Back in the 1920s, the plantation at Dockery, seven miles outside Cleveland, had a bigger population than the town itself. It had its own currency, train station, and entertainment. Musician Charley Patton recorded some of the first-ever blues records while living there, and under his influence Dockery became a hothouse of talent, nurturing the careers of future stars like Son House and Howlin' Wolf.

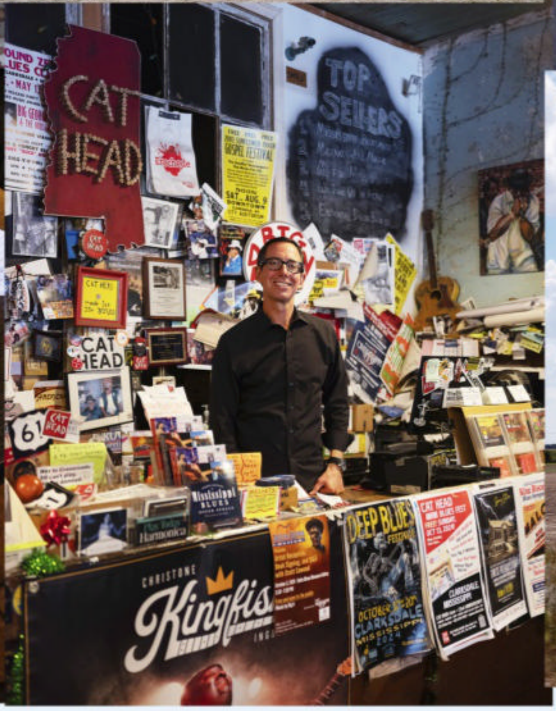
The next morning, I follow Bays's directions to Dockery, which today is an open-air, self-guided museum visited annually by thousands of music lovers from around the world. I walk through the collection of timber buildings by the side of the highway. The commissary where the workers came to spend their earnings burned down decades ago, but you can still find the stone slabs of its porch, where the musicians used to play. I stand on it and hear riffs emanating from unseen speakers. Either that, or I'm having a very high-definition hallucination.

Left column, from top: Leland's Highway 61 Blues Museum; Abe's Bar-B-Q in Clarksdale. **Center column, from top:** Clarksdale scenes—the Crossroads monument; historical facades downtown; owner Roger Stolle at Cat Head Delta Blues & Folk Art store. **Right column, from top:** Blues performer Lee Reed; the exterior of Red's Lounge, which has just a few tables inside; scenery along the Mississippi Blues Trail


61
Leland Blues Project Mission Statement
To honor the Mid-Mississippi Delta Blues artist and educate the public on their contribution to music and influence on the world


61
49
CROSSROADS
Juke Joint Festival

Coca-Cola
Coca-Cola


CAT HEAD
TOP SELLERS
CAT HEAD
Kingfish
DEEP BLUES

LEGEND HAS IT THAT ROBERT JOHNSON MET THE DEVIL

has inspired many a blues musician.

BLUES CLUB
CLARKSDALE, MS
NO DRUGS
RED'S BLUES LOUNGE

LAVENE MUSIC CENTER
BLUES CLUB

HERE AT THE START OF HIS CAREER.

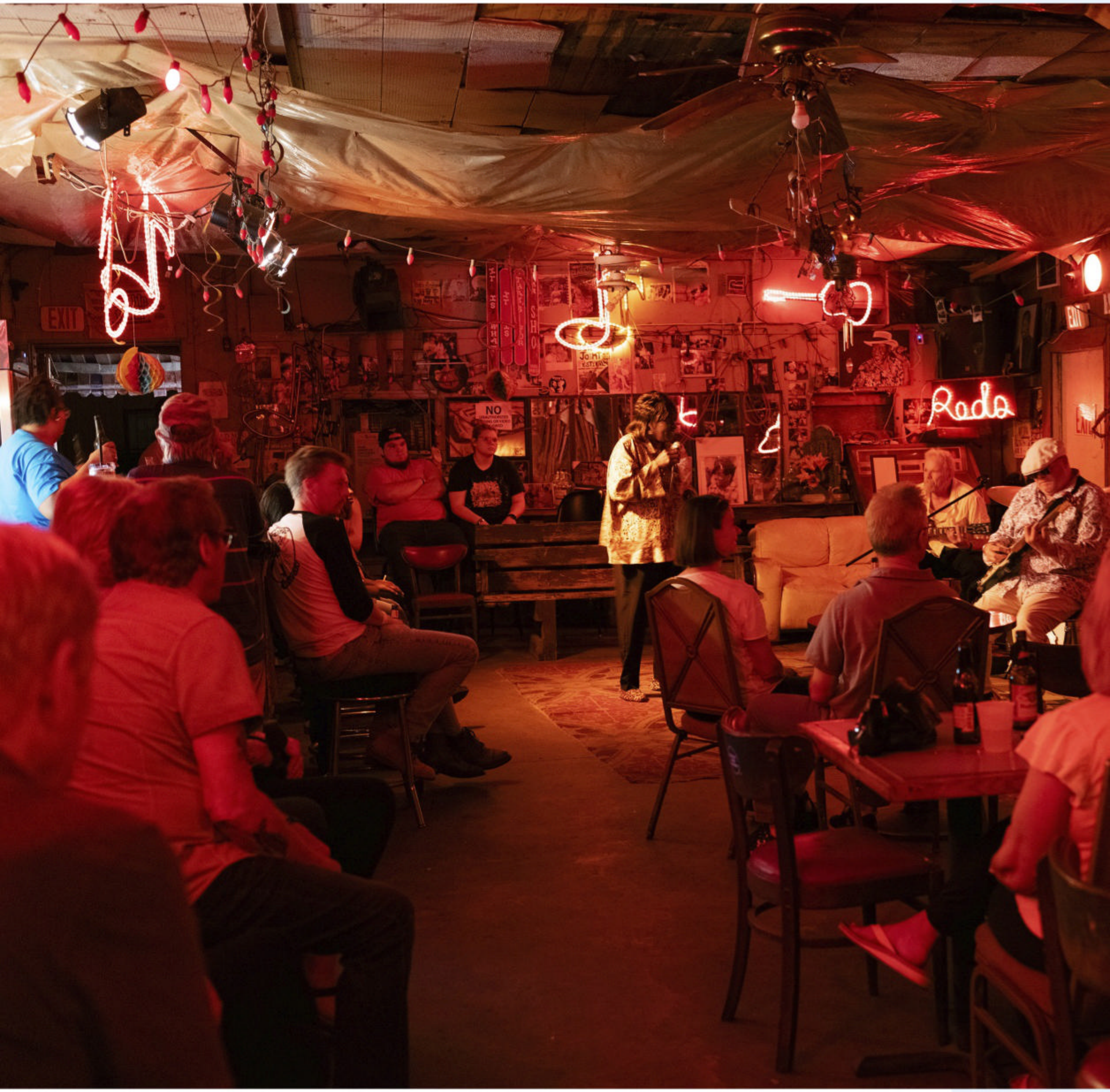
THIRTY-EIGHT MILES NORTH OF CLEVELAND is Clarksdale, which once claimed to be home to a greater proportion of millionaires than any other U.S. city. In the 1920s, Clarksdale was booming. And while its cotton-based wealth largely lined the pockets of white landowners, it also fostered a vibrant Black district called "The New World," whose clubs, cafés, and juke joints throbbed with patrons every Saturday.

Driving into its compact downtown of low-rise storefronts is like arriving on a movie set. The historic facades remain, in various states of repair. For decades, many sat vacant, their commerce drained by economic tides: the Great Migration, suburban flight.

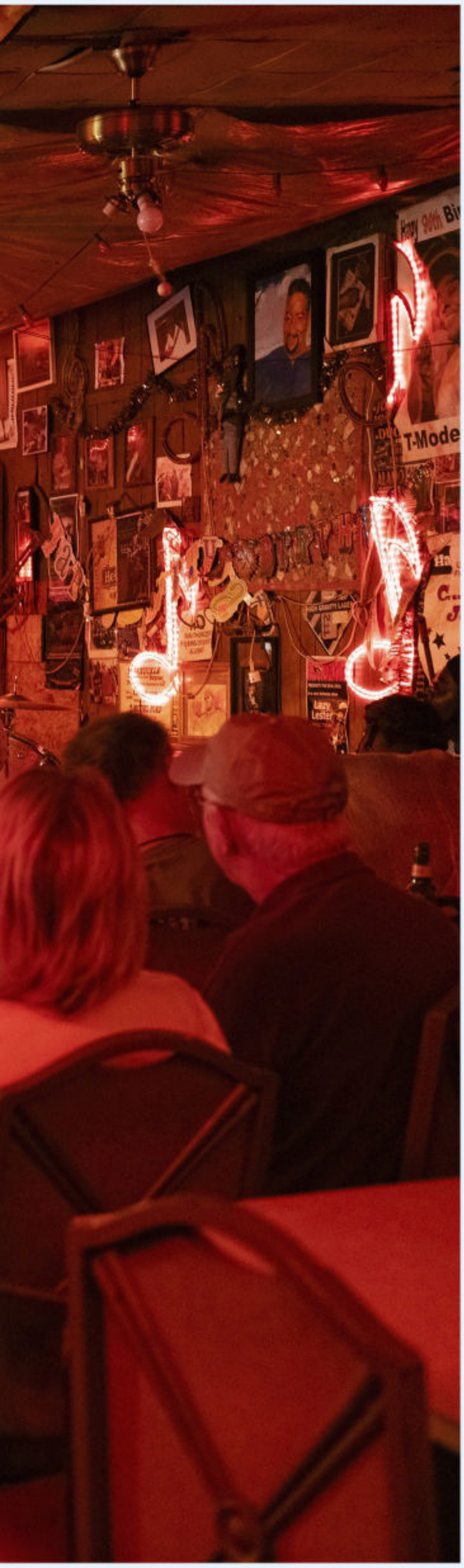
Any number of blues icons can be traced back to Clarksdale. Legend has it that Robert Johnson met the devil here at the start of his career, at the crossroads of Highways 61 and 49, selling his soul in return for his musical genius. He became one of the genre's biggest influences but died in 1938, at only 27. Muddy Waters was accidentally discovered in 1941 by the musicologist Alan Lomax on the Stovall Plantation just outside town, and subsequently rocketed to fame. John Lee Hooker, W.C. Handy, and Sam Cooke all lived in the city, and Bessie Smith died here, after a car crash on her way between gigs. The Riverside Hotel, where she spent her final hours, provided lodging to many of the area's famous musicians, including Robert Nighthawk and his young roadie, Ike Turner. The hotel's owners recently received a grant to help preserve it.

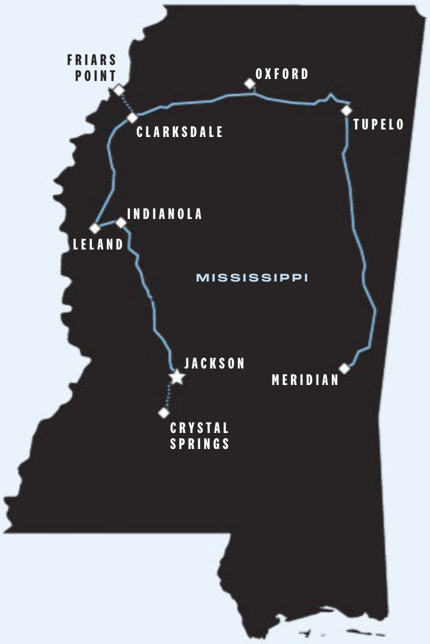
Blues fanatic Roger Stolle moved from St. Louis to Clarksdale in 2002 with a vision of a community revived by its musical heritage. Back then, the town was so deserted

Red's Lounge in Clarksdale is named after its late owner, Red Paden, who opened it in the early 1980s. It's one of the last juke joints in Mississippi.



THERE ARE ONLY A HANDFUL OF US IN THE TINY ROOM, AND IT'S LIKE THE BEST HOUSE PARTY I'VE EVER BEEN TO.





HOW TO TAKE A BLUES TRAIL TRIP

In 2006, the Mississippi Blues Commission created the Mississippi Blues Trail to mark historic musical sites—clubs, churches, cotton fields, record labels, streets, and museums. Today, the trail has more than 200 sites and counting. Here's where to start. —*EJ*

Begin your trip in **Jackson**, the soulful state capital; the Westin Hotel is centrally located. Head to the funky Fondren District for a night out at the live music venue Duling Hall, housed in a 1927 school; for a quieter evening, try the neighborhood of Belhaven Heights for a late performance at Urban Foxes coffee shop. The next day, drive into the Delta, where **Indianola**, 100 miles north, pays tribute to B.B. King in its museum and interpretive center.

Just 20 minutes to the west, the small town of **Leland** is worth a visit to hear Pat Thomas, son of famed bluesman James "Son" Thomas, play his father's music at the Highway 61 Blues Museum. It's also known for the Muppet collection at the Birthplace of Kermit the Frog Museum; Jim Henson, Kermit's creator, grew up here.

The unmissable blues town of **Clarksdale** has live music every day and festivals every month (not to mention kayaking on the Mississippi River). Make your first stop the Cat Head Delta Blues & Folk Art store, where you can find out which clubs are putting on gigs that day. Abe's Bar-B-Q—which has been serving its smoked-meat sandwiches for 100 years—and Meraki, a coffee roaster and arts charity, are both excellent spots to meet locals. Come evening, check into the 52-unit Shack Up Inn, which comprises a collection of former sharecroppers' cabins surrounded by farm equipment and literal tumbleweeds.

Tupelo, two hours east of Clarksdale, is the birthplace of Elvis. For a true diner experience, visit Johnnie's Drive-In, where, as a child, Elvis used to order hamburgers. For fine dining, head to Forklift, where your rabbit will be cooked three ways and paired with cauliflower cream. There's live blues at the Blue Canoe, which hosts excellent bands on a weekly basis. In 2021, the city got its first boutique hotel, Hotel Tupelo, in a downtown location once part of the Shake Rag district, home to many juke joints. The hotel's 79 rooms keep the Elvis references on the sophisticated side, and its restaurant, Jobos, has a cocktail bar.

South of Tupelo and east of Jackson is **Meridian**, another city with a famous musical son. Today, its attractions include the Jimmie Rodgers Museum, and you'll find live music at Brickhaus Brewtique and the Meridian Underground Music store. Seafood Express—inside a gas station on Highway 45—is the place for shrimp po'boys, plus catfish, crawfish, and crab. Just as beloved is Weidmann's, which has been serving fried green tomatoes since 1870. Book a stay at the Threefoot Hotel: This 16-story skyscraper, built in 1929, is an art deco marvel inside and out. Renovated in 2020, it's now a Marriott with 131 modern rooms.

Where to Detour

Oxford
Mississippi's best-known university town is a natural stopover halfway between Clarksdale and Tupelo. Here, fine dining (Saint Leo, City Grocery), fancy hotels (the Oliver), and a gallery scene (Southside, Oxford Treehouse), are accompanied by plenty of live music, and the Blues Archive at Ole Miss has regular exhibits. Stop by Kingswood Restaurant, whose weekend brunches are popular with residents.

Friars Point
Author William Faulkner and playwright Tennessee Williams each wrote about this tiny community outside Clarksdale. Guide Billy Howell can take you there as he drives along the levee on his Delta Bohemian Tours; he'll also introduce you to the places that inspired Williams's plays.

Crystal Springs
A quaint railway town 30 minutes south of Jackson, Crystal Springs contains a small museum dedicated to blues legend Robert Johnson, owned by his grandsons.

that his was often the only car in the street. "If I'd said then that by 2024 we were going to have two good coffee shops in Clarksdale, people would have laughed," he says. "But my belief was that if you had something genuine here that people could see, or hear, or experience, you could market that."

Stolle launched the Cat Head Delta Blues & Folk Art store and used his persuasion skills as a former adman to convince entrepreneurs and artists to move into Clarksdale's vacant properties. At Hambone Gallery, owner Stan Street sells his artwork by day and plays the blues by night; harmonica restorer Deak Harp repairs and sells instruments at his downtown workshop. Today, Clarksdale hosts live blues shows 365 days a year and is well situated for tourists en route between Memphis (an hour-and-a-half drive north) and New Orleans (five hours south).

At the Bad Apple Blues Club, the afternoon show has already begun. Entering its windowless interior from the sunny street temporarily blinds me, so when a voice asks me where I'm from, it takes a moment to pin it to the man in a pink trilby hat at the far end of the room. It turns out Sean "Bad" Apple pauses his set to welcome every new arrival, helping us find spots on a mismatched chair or beaten-up sofa, or selling us a beer from his icebox.

Apple walks the dozen of us in the audience through the musical evolution of the blues, illustrating it with guitar tunes, bee jokes, and Burt Reynolds impressions. His solo performance, in this setting that doubles as his home, reveals something in the music I haven't heard yet: the sound of a human looking for connection.

Over the next two days, I pinball between venues. There are a dozen in downtown Clarksdale, and the more gigs I attend, the more I find myself appreciating the blues' different moods, from uptempo grooves to slow melancholic delights. At Ground Zero Blues Club, co-owned by actor Morgan Freeman, I listen as Anthony "Big A" Sherrod bends the strings on his guitar with such emotion I feel sure I'm hearing them sing by themselves.

In Red's Lounge, Clarksdale's longest-operating juke joint, I encounter an energy so raw it seems to make the walls vibrate. Deak Harp is getting hectic on harmonica, backed by an achingly cool guitarist who never removes her shades. There are only a handful of us in the tiny room, and it's like the best house party I've ever been to.

A big part of the town's charm is the way it seems to have already made space for you. When I'm not at gigs I'm running into the people I've met at them: Big A fist bumps me one afternoon when I spot him outside the Delta Blues Museum, taking a break from the school-age students he teaches there. At Abe's Bar-B-Q, I'm treated like a regular by Phylis, who delivers my order—"have it with the slaw or there's no point having it at all"—then brings over a photo of her grandfather, who established the place 100 years ago.

Stolle told me that people come to Clarksdale for the music and stay for the community. I'm regretting that I must move on. But I do so with a new affection and appreciation for the music. On the way to Tupelo, when the blues radio I'm listening to loses signal and Howlin' Wolf cuts out mid-verse, I improvise the rest for him.

TUPELO IS A comfortable city, with ample playgrounds and on-street parking. What Tupelo doesn't feel is rock and roll, which is ironic, given its claim to fame as Elvis Presley's birthplace, its own stop on the Blues Trail.

Elvis's father Vernon, his grandfather Jessie, and his uncle Vester built the two-room Tupelo cabin in which Elvis was born in 1935 for $180. The "shotgun shack" has been preserved, and an accompanying museum, city park, and ornamental lake all honor the hometown hero.

I sit alone in the museum's 126-seat theater and watch a film about Elvis's childhood. He learned to sing at church but found rhythm in the streets of east Tupelo. His family home was close to the Black quarter of "Shake Rag," and juke joint music seeped into the streets, where Elvis was known to hang out. The first recordings he ever made were of the blues. The "revolutionary" sound of rock and roll is based on its scales and structure.

The next day, I head farther south, following the blues legacy to Meridian, my final stop. The streets are so quiet that a plastic cup scudding across the pavement sounds like thunder. The art deco brilliance of the downtown buildings reflects the wealth it once accrued as a railroad town. There was no more famous employee of that railroad than Jimmie Rodgers, aka the Father of Country Music, who became popular in the late 1920s before dying of tuberculosis at age 35.

At the extravagant Temple Theatre, a crowd has gathered. They listen as guitarists in various sizes of cowboy hats sing songs about moonpies and Jesus. The Sucarnochee Revue is the opening gig of the weeklong Jimmie Rodgers Festival, an annual tradition since 1953. Elvis himself performed in one of its early talent contests. (He came in second.)

In the lobby I chat with Alana Sparrow Broughton, one of the organizers. "I grew up listening to hard rock," she says. "I *hated* country music." But the more she learned about Rodgers, the more fascinated she became. A white worker on the railroad, he absorbed the work songs of the Black laborers, and their bluesy inflection became a key character of his songwriting. He has his own marker at the train station.

As I head out of Mississippi the following day, I think about how blues tones, style, and structure are woven through the music I love, from the balladry of bluegrass to the righteous funk of Motown. I realize the blues has been there all along. I think back to Bentonia and the Blue Front Cafe. "I don't care how big your house is, if it's got one bedroom or 21 bedrooms," Holmes had told me. "They all have one thing in common—a foundation. And blues is the foundation."

Emma John wrote about European train travel for Afar's Fall 2022 issue. Photo-based artist Miranda Barnes lives and works between Brooklyn and Austin.

Clockwise from top left: Ground Zero Blues Club, Bad Apple Blues Club, and Abe's Bar-B-Q, all in Clarksdale; Sean "Bad" Apple; tidal swamps along the Blues Trail.

Ground Zero Blues Club
BAD APPLE BL
Lite
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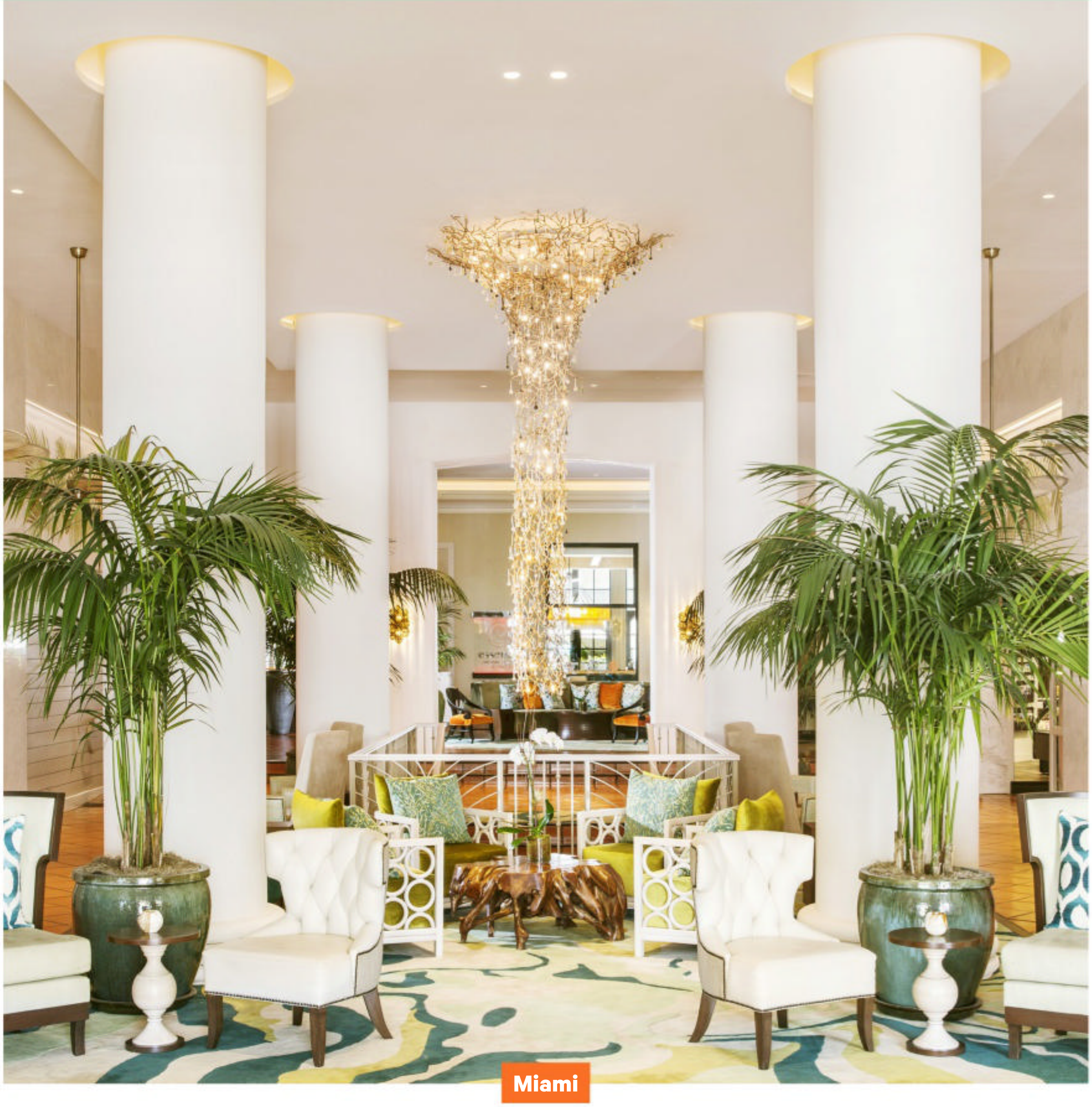

Miami

Cool Hunting

by Billie Cohen, *Afar Editorial Director*

MOST PEOPLE GO to Miami Beach for, well, the stylish beach. But it was so hot the weekend I took my mom to the Palms Hotel & Spa that we sought out different kinds of cool: refreshing spa treatments, ice cream, and air-conditioned museums.

Luckily, we didn't have to go far to start chilling out. The hotel staff welcomed us into the retro-designed lobby (pictured above) like old friends, offering icy drinks and recommendations.

One that came up repeatedly: Azucar scoop shop in Miami's Little Havana neighborhood, where we sampled Cuban-inspired flavors such as Abuela Maria (vanilla with guava, cream cheese, and Maria cookies). It was a deliciously frosty break, but we were happily sweating again once we joined the crowd across the street dancing to bands at Viernes Culturales, a monthly festival of food, art, and music.

The next day, we stuck to places with AC—and found them even more restorative than we'd expected. At Pérez Art Museum Miami, we laughed out loud as we pushed through Jesús Rafael Soto's ticklish installation of 5,600 bright blue hanging PVC tubes. We were delighted by giant neon outlines of hands, a car that looked like a piñata, and a button in the gift shop that said "museum nerd." At the Frost Science Museum, Aquarium & Planetarium across the plaza, we became kids again. In a temporary exhibit about the solar system, we stuck our heads in space suit helmets and pretended to be astronauts; in the aquarium, we stood hypnotized by colorful fish and the soft flutter of jellies.

On our last afternoon, we indulged in aromatic facials at the hotel's softly lit spa. By the time the weekend ended, we still hadn't stepped foot on the beach—and we hadn't missed it at all. Ⓐ

COURTESY OF THE PALMS HOTEL & SPA

Å være midt
i smørøyet.
'To be in the middle of the butter melting in the porridge'.
HURTIGRUTEN

Photo: Hurtigruten

In Norway, this saying means 'to be in a great place'. There's no greater way to experience the Northern Lights than on a Hurtigruten Signature Voyage directly beneath the Auroral Oval. This premium journey offers award-winning cuisine and exciting excursions. You won't be in the middle of butter melting in porridge, but you'll witness the greatest light show on earth, and your heart will melt at the sight.

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